

**Richard Pinnell, Posted on the ihatemusic board in October, 2005**  
**Month of Jerman Reviews**

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**Preliminaries:**

**September 28 (2005)**

OK, so amongst the haul of CDs I brought back from NYC was an order of 24 Jeph Jerman titles from Chris at ErstDist. This slightly eccentric purchase seemed to provide amusement to a few people at ErstQuake, so I have given some thought into what I am going to do with such a pile of new music from one artist.

And, inspired by a great conversation trying to explain the concept of British trainspotting anoraks to Chris Letchausen and also the whole NYC restaurant experience, an idea came to me whilst laying in my hotel bed listening to the sound of a Guns and Roses tribute band pounding up through the floor.....

Very much in the spirit of Morgan Spurlock's Super Size Me film, I am going to take this pile of Jerman releases, add a few I already owned, and listen to one disc of Jerman every day for the month of October. I will then attempt to write a paragraph or two on the music every day.

The point of this, (apart from the fact I find the whole thing rather amusing) is to see if it is possible to articulate anything new or remotely interesting as the month goes by. I want to ask a few questions about the nature of music writing and listening by enforcing this routine on myself. Can I write 31 posts of interest about the music of one person? (Many would argue that just the one could be difficult..!) Will I be sick of Mr Jerman's music by the end of it? Will my doctor recommend I stop after three weeks before I do any permanent damage to my health?

I start Saturday. Wish me luck!

**October 1**

OK, Before mentioning the music, a few more thoughts on this little endeavour.

Firstly, I know that purchasing 31 discs by one artist is a pretty daft and probably worthless thing to do. I should explain how this came about. The name Jeph Jerman was mentioned in high regard in various circles, enough to make me want to listen to something from him. I picked up a few MP3 files through soulseek, of which about 50% sounded very impressive, the others less so, but still quite interesting.

After taking a look at the vast size of his catalogue of released works I asked a few people through online forums and the IHM chatroom at soulseek if they could make a few recommendations about which discs were worth hearing. Unusually for such informed people, I couldn't get any decent recommendations beyond the couple of recordings I already had.

Then around this time two things happened. Firstly I made the decision to fly to New York to see the Erstquake Festival last weekend. This festival was funded by the proceeds from Erstwhile Distribution and I wanted to place a decent order to help 'do my bit' to support this great festival. Then secondly ErstDist got into stock a long list of Jerman recordings that were pretty much unknown to me. By purchasing the lot I have given some decent support to ErstQuake, given me a chance to discover this intriguing artist in depth, and hopefully I can help other bemused listeners who want to sort through the monolithic Jerman catalogue.

I just felt the need to explain that first of all. There is method in my madness, albeit a little skewed.

To decide the order the discs will be played in I numbered them randomly 1 to 31 and then asked the inhabitants of the sisk IHM chatroom to throw numbers at me to decide the order of selection. It was either this method or the I Ching, but I couldn't be bothered with all of that!

**Day 1 Jeph Jerman – Soundhouse Anomalous Records CDR**

And so the music. Or is it music?

From the little I know of Jerman and through reading his online notes over the past few days it seems possible that you can divide his releases into two. There are the discs that are recordings of his performances, solo and in collaboration where he uses usually naturally found objects to create a soundworld of his making. He also though has many releases that contain field recordings of natural or everyday sounds that he captures and places into the metaphorical 'frame' of a CD release to present them in a new light.

This CDR, Soundhouse, seems to fall into the latter category. It contains eight recordings of various objects or occurrences from around Jerman's Arizona house. One thing I am learning fast about his work is that the CD and track titles can mostly be taken very literally. Soundhouse is indeed sounds from around the house, and tracks like Metal Bedframe in Shed is a recording of exactly that.

The first thing that hits you with this disc, like many Jerman discs is the rough, lo-fi feel to the recording. On pressing play the first track jumps in with no fade, the hum of a recording microphone very evident. It seems clear that Jerman is presenting these pieces as a document of interesting sound, rather than making any attempt to shape them into any recognised 'music' format.

The tracks vary from recordings through the window of Jerman going about his daily chores, cutting wood etc, to the closely miked sound of a saucepan of soup steadily boiling. Most of them seem to be purely a case of Jerman placing a mic in a certain position and making a rough recording. The only track that suggests a little more human input is the aforementioned Metal Bedframe in Shed, where the frame appears to be stuck, dragged or somehow 'played' to create the banging and metallic sounds on the recording.

So what do I get from these recordings? Firstly they are all very interesting to listen to, especially with the given track titles providing reason to try and figure out how the sound has been made. The other interesting aspect for me is to hear how the sounds become compositional elements in a naturally forming 'music'. Often the sounds seem metallic, or machine made, and I regularly made the link between the noises included here and the sounds used by EAI musicians, 'Cooking Amplified' for instance sounds somewhere between Otomo's scraping turntable arm and Wastell's amplified textures.

The last track on Soundhouse is for me the real gem though. 'Soundhouse Sunset' is a rough recording made presumably in the evening, possibly from the porch of Jerman's home. Everything sounds slow, people walk around silently, footsteps drop into the bed of distant birdsong and passing cars to create a gentle mood. Dogs bark, insects hum and everything sounds at peace until the track like all of the others abruptly stops. I really like this piece. Interestingly it is one of the easier tracks to fathom how the sounds are made. Perhaps I am more at home with familiar sounds?

When I mentioned in the slsk chatroom that this album would be the first I listened to, Alex (aka Phaetonn) who is something of a Jeph Jerman officianado announced that his favourite Jerman recording could be found on this album. I asked him not to name it to see if I could make a guess. I really think it has to be Soundhouse Sunset, but we shall see!

My experience with this first album has been a very pleasant one. As it plays now for the third time in rotation it still sounds nice and I am looking forward to hearing more. (There is indeed a Soundhouse II amongst the remaining 30 albums) I would like to begin to think more about Jerman's reasons for making these recordings, but plenty of time yet I guess.

This will probably be the longest post in the series, firstly because I haven't become bored with the idea yet, but also because I am still on holiday from work following ErstQuake. If anyone else has heard Soundhouse, I'd love to hear your thoughts.

## **Day 2 – Jeph Jerman / Doug Theriault – 112 02'W 34 50' 15"N (Outer Limits 3) CDR**

Before commenting on today's disc, I have to report that I got Alex's favourite Jerman track very wrong yesterday. His favourite is Two Amplified Long Strings from the Soundhouse CDR. I did wonder about this, but I really thought there was no competition for Soundhouse Sunset!

OK, so today's disc comes from the other category of Jerman's music, improvised performance rather than field recordings. 112 02'W 34 50' 15"N is the catchy title of one of a series of duets recorded with Doug Theriault, a guy I know precisely nothing about.

Jerman is credited as playing a long list of natural objects, stones, water, pine cones etc, with which he uses contact mics to capture the tiny sounds made by rubbing, dropping, tapping, rustling them together. Theriault is listed as playing guitars, but also contact mic, wood and water.

The first three of the four tracks were recorded in January 2003 in an unnamed canyon in Arizona. Although the recording quality is again not so great, the canyon appears to be somewhat desolate, as beyond the mic hiss there is a deathly silence when the duo are not making music. In fact were it not for the occasional drone of an aeroplane passing over head you could be forgiven for forgetting that this music has been performed outside at all, but when that 'plane does pass over, the recording takes on a different resonance,

and the mental image of two guys sat in the deserts of Arizona jumps back into your head.

The music is made up of tiny sounds amplified, scratches, clicking, the occasional swirl of water. It is busy music yet very intimate, and peppered with brief silences. The scrap of paper attached to the inlay card compares the music to a recording Jerman made of ants running across a contact mic, and that's about how this feels.

It does also sound very musical though. Theriault's guitar is rarely recognisable, only on odd occasions do you sense the sound of a string being addressed, yet somehow it all sounds under control, Jerman able to select his sounds easily, the randomness of using found objects less evident here.

The fourth track is the result of two taped pieces, one by Jerman, one by Theriault combined together in a studio in Seattle. The Theriault track is overlaid onto a Jerman piece after they were recorded separately. The notes do not suggest if Theriault was able to listen to Jerman's contribution before adding his own, but the two sets of sounds do seem to come together nicely, suggesting that this was the case.

The slightly improved sound quality from the studio mastering bringing the sounds forward a little more, out of the background hiss. It has a feel of Musique Concrete, scrabbling, busy sounds from unknown sources, with only the occasional stab of a guitar instantly recognisable.

Jerman's musical history is as a percussionist, and that is clear from this work. I really like the way he uses the sounds of nature as his palette for creating music, but does not seem to feel the need to try every possible sound out with every possible object.

The fourth track here works by far the best for me, Theriault's discrete and very brief guitar interjections really work well with Jerman's tiny sounds. In places I am reminded of the free improv of people like John Stevens and John Russell in the early nineties whose music was often described as insect-like, I would not begin to pretend that this music reaches a similar level of improvisational conversation, but here the catalogue of sounds has a wider range than the work of those musicians and the textures achieved are very nice on the ear.

So two discs down and two very different recordings. So far it has been no problem finding things to say about Jeph Jerman's music and I am eager to hear more. I am interested to learn more about Doug Theriault also if anyone can help?

### **Day 3 – Jeph Jerman – Sound in Rooms (Seattle Nov 15 1996, Jan 11, 1997) Anomalous Records CDR**

Today was the first stressful day back at work after ten days break so I'm pretty exhausted this evening. I listened the first time through to today's disc in the car on the way home, an interesting exercise. The car is pretty quiet, but it was still pretty hard to make out what was music and what was road noise. Only listened once more fully through whilst cooking dinner, the popping of a pan full of Cajun prawns adding to overall feel...

And to be honest much of the music on Sound in Rooms (Seattle 1996-1997) isn't so far away from the rumble of the road and the crackle of a hot frying pan. I begin to wonder how much these recordings are meant to be listened to in isolation on a good stereo system, and how much they are meant to be allowed to become part of your everyday soundscape. Jerman's website namechecks John Cage in a few places, so perhaps my listening experiences today are closer to his intentions. I really must email him and ask.

This was recorded ten years ago now, possibly originally released as a cassette tape. The cloudy sound quality immediately hits you again when the first of the three tracks begins. Here again we have Jerman in improvisory mode, utilising assorted objects to create a magnified alien soundscape, this time solo.

The first of the three tracks is over twenty minutes long and features clusters of small crackling sounds that emerge faintly from the ever present tape hiss. The sounds here are all very similar but hard to accurately identify. The result is reminiscent for me of Xenakis' 1958 masterwork *Concret PH*, a tape manipulation of the sound of a popping and spitting log fire.

The second track uses a wider range of material, the random jangle glass or pottery knocking together is interrupted one minute in by what sounds like Jerman coughing. The piece moves into expressive muted

scraping sounds that remain unidentifiable despite making some very bold gestures compared to the rest of the disc.

The third short track returns to material closer to the first piece, once it settles after beginning with loud abrasive buzzing effects that suggest a bee caught in a jam jar. It captures a wider range of sounds than the opening track but still sounds very unobtrusive, going about its way in a hurried but steady manner, another suggestion of the ant music mentioned yesterday.

I feel that the first and last tracks are the most successful here, possibly because I just prefer the more naturalistic feel of these pieces, but also possibly because Jerman seems to be trying too hard on the second piece to draw interesting sounds into play, taking away some of the feel of a field recording that give much of Jerman's work I have heard so far its charm.

This is a quite satisfactory recording that sits in the background adding a nice ambience to the room, but does not make any grand musical statements. Whilst I expect to find better examples of Jerman's music over the next 28 days, this first excerpt from his Sound in Rooms series makes very pleasant listening.

#### **Day 4 – Jeph Jerman / Greg Davis – Cottonwood, Arizona Autumn Records CDR**

Today was the first real test of my resolve to keep this thing going. I had an accident with a falling table (don't ask) this evening and am writing this with a cold towel wrapped round my head trying to keep down a nice big bump that will be of great amusement to people at work tomorrow. Not particularly in mood to write a great deal.

Before I do though, I found this by Greg Davis whilst googling to find more information on this disc;

**“my parents have a cabin in christopher creek az which is slightly east of payson. i normally go to visit them for the holidays and at other random times. on this trip down, i decided to give jeph jerman a call (a person whose music i enjoy immensely). jeph lives in cottonwood az which is up and over the mogollon rim just about 2-3 hours northwest of payson. so on the morning of december 23rd, i went hiking with my father and he helped me collect some nice sounding natural objects such as: manzanita leaves, pine cones and needles, reddish rocks, burrs, and some driftwood branches. then i made the trip and met up with jeph, after his hard day of nut mixing. his quaint and quiet house is situated off a gravelly road among a small cluster of 2 or 3 houses. he cooked up some grilled cheeses for us and i had my first ever cup of genmai cha tea. we chatted for a bit about music and things as i admired his vast and inspiring collection of natural objects carefully scattered about various tables and areas around his house. jeph stoked up a really nice sounding fire in his old wood burning stove, which you can hear playing with us in the background. we recorded these 4 pieces using selections from jeph's collection of natural objects. i had the idea that we should turn up the gain really high on the microphones and play really quietly. this led to some really nice quiet and sparse playing but it also made the recording a bit hissy, which i dont mind so much now after a few listens. track 3 is indebted to 'inlets' by john cage where the performers are instructed to tip conch shells filled with water to make unpredictable gurgles and bubbles. this was cage's idea of "contingency" improvisation. we filled up some of jeph's conch shells with water and gave it a try ourselves. after we finished recording, we listened back to a little bit of it and jeph showed me a few art/sound books by hugh davies, steve peters and akio suzuki. i said farewell and headed back through the pitch black darkness to christopher creek, encountering a half-dozen or so elk along the way. i returned to my parent's cabin with refreshed ears ready to hear the world again after having been deadened by too much city life. “**

I have pasted this here for a reason, (and not just to save me having to write so much). Initially when listening to this CD a bit earlier for the first time, I was struck by how close the first couple of tracks sounded to some of the more minimal laptop improvisation I have heard over recent years. The information on the rather beautiful CD packaging is somewhat sparse, and not knowing a great deal about Greg Davis I wondered if perhaps it was in indeed a laptop I was listening to. I then googled a little bit to find a short note describing Davis' work which stated that laptop was one of the instruments he played. Pleased as punch at my acute listening skills being able to identify this, I carried on googling only to find the above written about this recording. Now I feel pretty stupid.

Davis' notes above really warm me to Jerman as a person even though we have as yet not even swapped a solitary email. The genmai tea, the Cage references, the Hugh Davies recording all endear me to this man, and again, this CD today is better than the three I have heard so far.

Recorded two days before Christmas in 2003 this is the most recent recording I've played thus far. Despite Davis' initial dissatisfaction with the hiss on the tape, the first thing that struck me was how quiet it was in comparison to the first three recordings. It's still there, but not so oppressively obvious as some of the previous discs. The overall sound here is really rather quiet, the tinkling and clicking of small shells, twigs etc is unobtrusive on the ear, and is spaced apart here and there with long gaps of tape hiss smothered silence.

Jerman and Davis focus each piece on a certain selection of sounds, so that each track remains very simple, with the shape and texture of the music taking on an almost electronic feel. By restricting the sound palette within each piece the listener is less inclined to wonder where each noise originates and the interplay between the two musicians becomes more apparent. This is where this disc really works for me. It is the most fully formed and least random recording yet. Although it is still impossible to tell the two musicians apart, the communication between the two is obvious here and the music is all the better for this.

The third track, described by Davis above as a tip of the hat to Cage has a sound quite separate from the other three pieces. Indeed it obviously sounds like air being blown into water, with the odd metallic rustle lower in the mix but it isn't such a great leap of the imagination to imagine these sounds coming from a laptop.

Interestingly, last night after finishing with Jerman for the day I played the recent Mueller/Schoenecker disc on Longbox, and I found myself listening closely to try and make out the different sounds involved, how they were created and who was playing what. This reminds me of when I was about 15 and spent a few months playing Tetris on a Nintendo Gameboy incessantly. I found myself immediately after a long session seeing the world as a series of oddly shaped blocks as I went about my day. Too much of any one thing becomes addictive I guess.

Now the towel is dripping cold water down the back of my neck so that's enough for today!

#### **Day 5 – Jeph Jerman – Wet Beaver Creek, Oak Creek Anomalous CDR**

Thanks to all of the kind comments above, pleased to hear my torrent of drivel is going down well in some quarters!

I'm afraid tonight's entry will be short though as it's half past ten at night I have only just got in from an evening trip to London that took longer than expected. Blame Alastair for gassing too much in the pub

To be honest though, I think I would be struggling to write a great deal about tonight's disc anyway. Made up of three tracks, the first recorded seven months after the second and third, Wet Beaver Creek, Oak Creek is as you may be coming to expect now, recordings of water trickling its way along a couple of creeks.

The first track is taken from Wet Beaver Creek and is the only piece recorded here in stereo. The tape hiss is less apparent again with this recording, but the sound that fills the room from the second you press play is the rush of water downstream, recorded closely so that every little ripple and gurgle is captured. There is no 'human' involvement in the sound, this is a disc of pure unprocessed field recordings.

Interestingly though, I find myself listening deep into the sound despite its persistent unchanging nature. The sound is actually made up of thousands of little flicks and clicks as the water tumbles over itself on its unstoppable way. It is reminiscent of Jerman's improvisatory playing with shells and stones etc, just a little faster and relentless.

I am finding that the most enjoyable way to listen to this music is to forget the original context of the recording, forget that this is a recording of water and consider it as a collection of abstract sounds rushing past.

I first listened to this recording on the way home from London on the train. The ambient sound that made its way past my headphones was considerable, and it was quite hard to make out the recording. The sound of the train rushing over the tracks and the distant murmur of people talking worked very well with this disc, though when a rather overweight gentleman sat beside me and shouted obscenities into his mobile phone for the last half an hour I will admit to turning the player off in resignation.

I then put it on again for the short car journey home from the station and it sounded wonderful to the extent that I sat in the car outside the house for a few moments listening once I was home, but sat still the effect was not the same.

The second track is very similar to the first, if anything the water rushes a little faster and the mono recording creates a more abstract feel to the sound, resulting in a more percussive effect. The last track however is a recording made by attaching a contact mic to a twig in the creek. It isn't really clear whether the mic is submerged under water or not (I'm not sure if it would still work if it was?) but the recording here is shorn of the rush of water that filled the first two tracks and instead we have a constant flow of bubbling rhythms, reminding me in a somewhat oblique way of gamelan music or the clay percussion used in some African music. At the same time though it is very clear that once the microphone has been set in place there is no human hand at work here, these are entirely natural sounds captured on tape.

Wet Beaver Creek is on the surface a very straightforward field recording. It doesn't go anywhere, and doesn't develop as a piece of music in any way. It is a presentation of a set of sounds to listen to as you choose. If you approach it with this in mind and allow your mind to wander a little beyond any literal interpretation it becomes very interesting.

Seems I managed to write a reasonable amount anyway. I'm amazed how easy this has been so far.

Oh and if anyone is interested I have a dent in my forehead that hurts, but nothing serious!

### **Day 6 – Jeph Jerman / Albert Casais – Add This To That Shadow Puppet**

One of the key features of Jeph Jerman's releases that I have as yet left unmentioned is the packaging. Very much like the music itself, these are pretty much lo-fi releases, with usually hand made covers. Track listings are often printed from a computer, cut out and glued into place on hand printed sleeves, sometimes adorned with glossy prints of Jerman's photography, most often taking the form of pictures of the items used to create the music, or other pictures from nature.

The overall feel of the packaging is one of real beauty. Unfortunately about half of the releases here suffer from the curse of the jewel box, (albeit the slightly more palatable slim version) but even these have a home made feel to them. Later in the month there is an item of stunning beauty that will take some effort to give justice to with a review, but for now today's disc is a lovely piece of work in itself.

The CDR is inside a standard clear polythene sleeve that also contains a list (a long list!) of the assorted found items used on this recording and some photos of the said objects.

This is all then wrapped in some beautiful hand made recycled paper, a rich yellow coloured parchment dotted with pieces of grass and other bits and pieces, and then roughly stapled together around the disc, a lovely item worthy of the lovely music inside.

I am very conscious of the fact that I am describing many of these Jerman discs as 'the best so far' but I have to say yet again that this may be the case with Add This To That.

Yet again (predictable this isn't it?) I have no prior knowledge of Albert Casais but googling his name reveal him as the man behind The Shadow Puppet label that released this disc. He also works under the name Omnid, but this means even less to me.

Add This To That is probably the most professionally recorded disc I've listened to here yet. The tape hiss is virtually non existent allowing the sounds to sit in silence. The funny thing is that whilst the hiss annoyed me for the first couple of days of this listening series I almost miss it here!

The better recording quality does allow you to really take in the subtlety of the sounds on this disc though, and it is a very rewarding experience to really sit back, shut your eyes and take in the extraordinary musical language at work. The two musicians exchange the tiniest slithers of sound with each other, ranging from the now standard pin pricks and crackles, but augmented here by some interesting scraping sounds that I cannot place the origin of. Jerman even allows a brief snatch of a toy xylophone to slip into the midst of it all at one point, the first time I have heard him use anything other than naturally sourced objects in his improvisatory playing.

This disc is all about two musician's musical conversation like any other improv duo, but again it is the choice of instrumentation that lends this its special magic. You are forced to sit and listen to sound rather than instruments, and your brain seems forced to work harder to process what it is sent because this information is divested of the automatic musical language of everyday instrumentation.

I am really tired tonight after thirteen hours stressful work today so my sensations are dulled a little, and I am finding it hard for the first time to find words for this music, yet it still manages to place me in a certain state of mind. My ears are hyper aware of the sounds within the room. The hum of the computer's fan, the muffled

chatter of my brother's television downstairs, the creak of my chair as I sit back in it to read what I have just written.

Perhaps I will write a little more on this disc tomorrow when I am less inclined to want to fall straight into bed. It will be interesting to see if I like this as much when I have a slightly more rounded control of my senses!

### **Day 7 – Jeph Jerman – Sound in Rooms, Los Angeles 3rd August 2002, Albuquerque 11th April 2002**

So more solo Jerman from the Sound in Rooms series. This is probably my least favourite of the recordings I have listened to so far. The first piece, from a place called Beyond Baroque in Los Angeles is an interesting version of Jerman's improvisatory style. He appears to use a similar method to making his music here as on the previous discs, but he uses larger blocks of wood in what sounds like a large echo friendly space in place of the tiny stones and other items from the previous recordings.

There is an element of guesswork here on my behalf but it almost sounds like the first track here is a larger scale version of his usual apparatus. It sounds as if he is working with wood and maybe large stones directly on the floor, shuffling them into one another, dropping them, and generally working with the sounds made when the objects come into conflict with one another.

About eighteen minutes into this first piece the sound changes dramatically. Jerman seems to whirl something about in the air to create a wind effect that serves as a kind of cyclical drone for a few minutes before he returns to the louder sounds as before. The recording quality is not so good, but here the music sounds distant and the sharpness of the sound is muffled and lost in the background rather than just set against tape hiss as in the other recordings.

The second piece at just over half an hour in length fares better, but features many of the same sounds to the first despite the five months between the recordings. This track is enveloped in a heavy fog of tape noise that is less of a hiss and more of a warm hum, providing a nice base for the sounds to fall into.

The piece uses many of the wooden block styled sounds in places, but also leaves a lot of space for them to work a little better, there is a less random feel to the piece all round. Near the end the swishing sounds reappear though, without any real effect. Here it is possible Jerman is swiping a branch of some type back and forth fast through the air, but the sound is a little obvious, and for me adds little to what has gone before.

After the beautiful little structures of yesterday's disc this was a little bit of a let down. I think my preference is for the quieter, more intimate area of Jerman's catalogue. This piece is obviously designed to be louder and in places more aggressive than the other recordings, but for my taste much of the subtlety is lost here.

The end of this working week has been very tough for me, work has been very stressful and demanding and it has not escaped my attention that my attentive listening ability has suffered. Hopefully this weekend with a little rest things will improve again.

### **Day 8 – Bernhard Gunter, Jeph Jerman – Buddha with the sun face, Buddha with the moon face. Digital Narcis**

An interesting moment this evening. I went out for a meal this to an old 17th Century pub beside the river Thames in a quieter part of Oxfordshire. Before going out I had a bath, during which I accidentally got water in my left ear. This coupled with the fact I have been a little run down with a mild cold this week left my hearing somewhat impaired.

It was while sat in the pub I noticed something interesting that immediately brought me to think of my experiences here. Every so often my ear would block, and the sounds I heard would be muffled as if under water. I found I struggled to hear certain types of softer sound such as the human voice (which rather annoyed the girlfriend) but sharper, louder noises such as the rattle of cutlery or the banging of doors were amplified. The overall effect left me focussing my hearing on these sounds, listening for music within them, relating the different sounds to one another. In places I could even hear my own heartbeat in my ear, adding a deeper, slightly disconcerting rhythm.

Normally this kind of thing annoys me and I would sit wagging my finger in my ear trying to clear it, but this time, undoubtedly because of my current thoughts about these matters, I left things be. Didn't impress the girlfriend a great deal though!

So to tonight's disc. Well in some ways this is a bit of a cheat as I have owned and enjoyed this release for a few years now. Bernhard Gunter's minimal electronic compositions have been amongst my favourite music for a long time, and the release of this disc in 1999 was the first time I came across Jeph Jerman's name.

In brief, Gunter invited Jerman to submit a recording for release on his Trente Oiseaux label after he was mesmerised by Jerman's live show when they shared a bill at the Anomalous Records space in Seattle. Jerman sent a tape to Gunter, but the poor sound quality and abundant background noise put Gunter off of releasing the recording as it was, and instead he set about working with Jerman's tape to create a new piece using his sounds.

I have long adored this disc, but now listening again for the first time in a good few months with the experience of extended Jerman listening behind me it makes a lot more sense. Gunter has left most of Jerman's sounds alone, occasionally bring them forward in the mix, digitally sharpening them here and there and most probably rearranging them somewhat, but at its essence there remains the bulk of a Jerman recording here.

Gunter has made a feature of the tape hum that was obviously all over the original recording, smoothing it out a little, making it warmer and involving it further with the surface sounds. I feel I already know the Jerman piece that is used within here, but I most probably do not. A small tuneful pattern emerges ten minutes into the piece. Its hard to identify the source of the sound, but it may be the surface of an object played with a bow or something similar. The pattern arises as the same notes reappear, creating an odd little melody for a few seconds, but I am not sure if this is the way Jerman played to begin with or if Gunter has looped a section to create this effect. Either way it sounds hauntingly beautiful amongst the rattle of stones and the deep colours of the background drone.

Bernhard Gunter has always had a very sensitive ear for sound and it does not surprise me at all that he chose to work with Jeph Jerman. The real delight of this recording is in the wonder that can be found in these sounds and Gunter's respectful treatment of them. His approach to the piece is typically subtle. Whilst digital processing is marked in some areas but he is also not afraid to leave sections untouched. At one point an aeroplane can be heard passing slowly overhead as could be heard on the Jerman/Therault disc from day 2, suggesting perhaps that the original tape was made out of doors.

My only gripe with this wonderful release is that it is only twenty one minutes long and it is over almost as soon as it begins. All the same it works perfectly at this length, a small haiku of simple, beautiful sound. This allusion to zen is echoed in the title which refers to the fact that Gunter and Jerman each spend a lot of time in extreme climates, Jerman in the Arizona Desert, Gunter in the cold with the winter moon continually visible.

The influence of zen and in particular the wabi sabi aesthetic that rejoices in all things natural and slowly decaying has always been important to Gunter's music. After listening again here, I wonder if Jerman has similar interests.

In one way Jerman and Gunter are very different in their approach to making music. Whilst Jerman uses rough analogue recordings of purely natural acoustics, Gunter works with the clean precision digital processing. Yet this release shows that they both have a deep love of sound and the effect it can have on the human mind when presented in a suitable way. If you are able to find this unfortunately out of print release on the Japanese Digital Narcis label I heartily recommend that you grab it quick.

#### **Day 9 – Jeph Jerman – Instability Studies. CDR**

Today's disc is very interesting and a departure from Jerman's working practices on the previous recordings. Instability Studies is the fitting title for this set of four recordings that mostly utilise an object called a Shaketable as its main source of inspiration. Google reveals a shaketable to be a flat wooden table mounted on springs that is vibrated by a motor causing anything placed upon the table top to vibrate erratically. The instrument is used to test the stability of model buildings in an earthquake situation before the full size building is constructed.

The last three tracks here are recordings made of a shaketable with assorted items placed upon it. Tracks 2 and 3 are named Shaketable (simple) and are basic stereo recordings. The first thing apparent in these recordings is the table's motor whirring in the background, setting a base into which the various items placed on the table rattle and quiver at varying speeds, creating a mixture of blurred vibrating sounds and the occasional crash as objects strike each other.

Track 2 begins with very small buzzing sounds as smaller items are vibrated, but later in the piece larger objects seem to be added and the vibration rate is possibly slowed down, making the sounds appear slower and more obvious compared to the electronic sounding reverberations of the opening minutes.

Track 3 starts fiercely with what sounds like several items crashing about before settling into a continual mechanical routine, adjusted every so often when new objects are added or taken away from the table. The piece ends in typical Jeph Jerman manner (i.e. when he just stops the tape)

Track 4, *Shaketable* (complex) is a lot longer than the other two, stretching to 26 minutes in all. This piece sees Jerman take several of the shaketable recordings and overdub them on a four track mixer. The layering of the tracks is sensitively done, slowly allowing the vibrations and whirring of the recordings to settle into each other and merge into a thick detailed construction. On the previous two tracks it is not easy to see how much control Jerman had over the sounds created beyond deciding which objects should be placed upon the table. Here though, as the tracks cross each other, creating a feeling of delay and echo there is a real sense of construction apparent. This piece is a more rewarding listen to the first two, possibly as the layering of the multiple tracks provides the further dimension of depth to the sound as the tracks merge into each other.

The first track on the disc does not appear to involve the shaketable. 'Sugar Bowl' is a recording that uses a ceramic sugar bowl and its ill-fitting lid as its sound source. Here it seems that overdubbing effects are in use again, though this is not suggested on the brief slip of paper hidden inside the sleeve. The lid of the sugar bowl, when not seated properly rocks in its place creating a vibrating ring that lasts a few seconds before dying away. The sound is different depending on how vigorous the vibration of the lid and how it is positioned in its place. This first track is made up of many of these small moments of sound layered across each other. The piece is an interesting use of everyday acoustic phenomena in a compositional environment, again making me pay attention to how my tea mug wobbles on the uneven coaster on my desk and the sounds of my fingers typing this into the keyboard.

The sleeve art extends the theme of instability a step further. Jerman has drawn a swirl of glue onto the simple white cardboard sleeve onto which sand has been poured, sticking in place and creating a delicate little pattern that flakes away into sand grains again when it is touched.

*Instability Studies* is a nice recording, making the listener reflect upon the fleeting nature of the sounds around us. Musically it is not as nice to listen to as Jerman's more sparse improvisations but the way in which it is constructed leaves the listener a lot to reflect upon.

#### **Day 10 – Jeph Jerman – *Trees and Shrubs*. Autumn Records CDR**

A shorter review tonight as been out all evening. Driving home in the dark I felt tired so put on the radio at full blast rather than listen to tonight's Jerman disc. I found a station playing modern Indian rap music which did the trick and cranked it up high.

However now I have got in, its eleven at night and I have put on *Trees and Shrubs* on headphones and its a jarring experience. Moving from the brash, in your face confrontation of the music driving home to this gentle, delicate wash of natural sound requires a real shift in listening sensibility.

As this is part of Autumn's beautifully packaged *Leaves* series, the sleeve information is somewhat sparse. All we are told is that this was recorded with contact microphones onto an inexpensive stereo cassette machine sometime in 2000. The sounds that make up the 29 minute single piece are a continual, deeply textured rumble that seems to move in a cyclical manner, turning over on itself and sounding like ancient rusting clockwork parts moving again for the first time in decades and then recorded underwater...

Clearly the contact mics are being used against surfaces here, perhaps moved over them in a regular rhythm to create the feeling of motion that the recording suggests. What does confuse me however is how the sounds I hear relate to the title of *Trees and Shrubs*.

Apart from a passage towards the end when it sounds as if the mic is being pulled through thick leaves to create a rushing sound it is hard to make out any obvious use of the sound source.

Contact mics by their very nature have the tendency to amplify tiny sounds into loud brittle events and that is what we hear here, but whilst the catalogue of noises that develop are all quite industrial and mechanical sounding it is just as likely they are the result of nothing more than the mic being rubbed across the bark of a tree.

The rolling, circular nature of this disc reminds me of the tide breaking against a rocky bay. It also is reminiscent of the Wet Beaver Creek recordings where the contact mic was placed close to the rush of water moving downstream.

Trees and Shrubs is on one hand quite a noisy disc with little space to be found from the moment it begins to the point it is unceremoniously stopped, but it is also very calm and relaxing. The rolling sound becomes hypnotic after a while, never breaking into any speed, evolving very little, as if just going about its way and captured by the passing mic.

The real beauty here is in the fact I cannot say how this was recorded, and thus I am forced to forget its origins and just listen to it for what it is. I like this one.

### **Day 11 – Jeph Jerman – Derelict 1 CDR**

Ok so at just over a third of the way through this project I have managed despite assorted setbacks to maintain my daily post. I have mixed feelings so far about how things are going. Remembering to sit back and listen to a new Jerman CD every evening is no problem at all, the listening experience has been really enjoyable and informative to me.

Putting my thoughts on the music into words has been a harder task though. Making the effort to sit down and do this every evening has been tough, but one of the reasons I set about this mission was to see if I could find this discipline within me and so far I have stuck with it.

I have found the actual task of putting my listening experience into words very difficult. It has been easy to merely paint descriptive pictures of the music with words, but I have struggled to capture much about the way this music encourages me to listen differently, and this is something I will try and address over the next 20 entries.

So to tonight's disc; having a little more time this evening, I have listened to this through three times now. Derelict is a set of 12 field recordings, recorded at five different locations. The sites are described as derelict ghost towns and abandoned buildings spread around the United States.

The first track begins with an eerie stillness. It is titled simply Lampost and is recording at a trading post near Flagstaff, Arizona. I am not sure how the Lampost has been used to make this recording, but what exists on the tape is a virtually empty recording of occasional haunting sounds, perhaps the wind blowing through the lampost somehow. There is a distant rumble of passing vehicles evident, but the piece all round leaves you in a state of repose. My mind paints pictures of an empty town, grey buildings with boarded up windows. The title of the disc forces you to make this link, but even without it the solemn emptiness of this recording would point you in that direction.

The further two tracks recorded at the same location have a similar feel to them. The third brief track, 'Walking' includes the occasional sound of trudging feet and disturbed metal and rubble on the floor. These pieces use the ambient noise that pervades even the most deserted parts of human inhabitation to paint cinematic pictures in your head. Listening to them this evening at reasonable volume was a strange yet rewarding experience.

Transposing those sounds from their natural home to here, thousands of miles away in a different country is an odd concept to get my head around. Capturing these recordings is almost like capturing a piece of the soul of that empty trading station and then setting it free via my hi-fi system. Maybe this is an over the top thing to say about what is essentially just a field recording, but these three pieces in particular manage to get me feeling this way.

Tracks four and five capture the sound of chicken wire and then scrap metal in the rain respectively at separate locations. The fifth track in particular has a peculiar resonance to it, highly percussive random sounds fill the track as the sound of heavy raindrops hitting the metal is amplified. Here we go back to the concept I have formed of natural accidental sounds becoming abstract musical elements, shorn of their original status and taking on a new life when placed in this context.

Track six follows in a similar vein, recordings of barbed wire scraped over scrap metal, and then track seven is the claustrophobic sound of things being dropped down an old well, sometimes hitting structures on their way down, but ending with a satisfying splash.

Tracks eight and nine are recordings of a deserted old train car, and these return to some of the moods of the first few pieces. Track eight in particular is very sparse, it seems this is recorded inside the old train, and

little can be heard bar the hiss of the tape and the wind blowing about the car, making pieces of rusty metal twitch and scrape against themselves. Track nine has a similar feel but now the recording has moved to outside as the wind buffets the mic wildly here, making for a noisy recording, but with the sounds of the train evident still in the background.

Track ten is less interesting. Listed as the recording of a ceremonial cave it begins with a lot of crashing and clunking about before falling into near silence and finally a few snippets of human voices as if a trip through the cave has been caught by a tourist that left the recording function of his video camera running by mistake.

The disc ends with two more short pieces, the first a recording at a disused mine shaft, and the last, entitled 'Tumbleweed' is made up of close recordings of rustling and scraping, though it is hard to recognise the sound source accurately and it is difficult to work out how tumbleweed played a part in its making.

These recordings were very enjoyable. The first three tracks in particular gripped me to the speakers and forced me to play them several times. With these tracks Jerman seems to have captured the mood and feeling of a location perfectly. These are perfect examples of how sound taken out of context can become music itself, bringing some of the emotion and atmosphere of the place along with it.

There is a Derelict 2 due later in the month, and I look forward to it now with great interest.

### **Day 12 – Jeph Jerman, Doug Theriault – Red, water (Fargone Records CDR)**

A short review tonight as been out. Listened to tonight's disc on the way home in the car whilst driving through heavy rain that hammered against the windscreen. This was probably the most fitting CD yet to be playing in those conditions as the sounds on the disc and the sounds of the rain merged together very closely. Listening now on headphones back in my house with the lights dimmed the feeling of the rain and cold remains with me.

I really like this disc. The photo that wraps around the familiar Fargone white paper sleeve is of Beaver Creek, the site of a previous set of recordings here. This release has been conducted through the post, with Jerman listed as contributing 'field recordings, digital' and Theriault 'processing, real time'. This would suggest that Jerman has made some field recordings that he has then sent to Theriault to work with live to produce the final recordings we have here. One of Jerman's subjects seems again to be Beaver Creek as the rush of water going about its way seems to make up the basis for much the piece, but Theriault has done a lot of work on the recordings to rework the sounds within them.

The main structure of the one forty five minute track is for phases of continual textured sound to move in and out, often starting and stopping abruptly as they come and go. The sound of running water is sometimes very clear and unaffected, but then in other places it is abstracted into a buzz of electronic static and passages not at all dissimilar to the sound of rain pouring against the window. Later in the disc birdsong and the familiar chimes of stone against stone are also stirred into the melting pot, towards the end processed to a degree it becomes hard to identify the source material.

I am guessing that the majority of the processing of the sound is the work of Theriault, and if this is the case he understands Jeph Jerman's soundworld very well, working to create new structures and sounds but in a manner very sympathetic to the feel and origin of the existing work.

Some of the discs I have listened to and discussed here seem more about the simple beauty of sound, recordings made and then left largely untouched so they can just be listened to with no preconception or evaluation of the human impact upon them. Here though, there is definately a composition placed before us, using the field recordings at its heart.

The mixture of electronic processing and raw acoustic footage is very appealing to me here on red, water. I enjoy the way the two mesh in places and then stand far apart elsewhere. The whole work moves along slowly at a slow pace. Further into the disc the sound of rushing water is replaced by the twittering of birds on a Sunday morning. The hint of computer processing throws you every so often, removing the sounds from the comfort zone of how we remember they should sound and creating new digitised worlds for them. In places the processing is subtle, just slightly shifting the sound from their normal axis, but elsewhere the deconstruction is marked and little remains of the source recording.

This is a fragile, finely crafted work of real beauty in the most simple sense of the word. In a different way to how Bernhard Gunter worked simple structures around Jerman's recordings on their collaborative disc,

Therault here takes the raw material and moulds it like clay into similar but always slightly removed shapes and textures. This is a hard disc to find by all accounts, with few copies remaining in circulation, but if you enjoy Jerman's work and you spot a copy I recommend you snap it up.

### **Day 13 – Jeph Jerman – Beech Tree and Birds. Manifold Records CDR**

Tonight I have really struggled to listen and write with the same verve as previously. Late this afternoon I had a wisdom tooth extracted and the experience has been far from enjoyable. In some ways I have just felt like curling up on the sofa with something nice to listen to, but having to sit and write up the experience afterwards has been difficult, and focussed listening is also not so easy when your mouth feels like its full of a combination of barbed wire and cotton wool.

The first thing that struck me about this release was the packaging. The CD is in a clear wallet that also includes a CD booklet sized section of a map of the British Isles. I am pretty sure that random sections of maps have been cut up so that each of the discs is unique, but it did make me smile to see my home county there in front of me when I slid the disc out earlier.

The track listing here was initially a little confusing. There are four tracks listed on the small square of paper glued halfway across the English Channel, yet only two tracks show when the disc is placed in the player. All four tracks do exist here though, and here we are treated to four more examples of Jerman's field recordings from nature.

The first and title track sounds as if a microphone has been left in the beech tree as it consists of amplified rustling against the mic, presumably the sound made as the tree sways in the wind. This sound is quite aggressive and fills the music on the surface, but in the gaps in between you can hear the gentle twittering of birds in the trees breaking through in the background.

Bamboo and birds, the second track, is not that dissimilar, though the sounds are different again, from the more percussive sound of the bamboo to the more distant call of the birds and there are also large spaces that appear in the recording where little happens. These pieces return me to my attempts to try and process what I am hearing. The sounds do not relate themselves easily to the descriptions on the packaging, so my mind tries to associate them to mechanical or electronic sounds, when in truth it should spend less time assessing and more time just listening.

The third track, Sycamore Creek is again the sound of water rushing past a microphone. Hearing this reminds me of the famous quote used to describe the music of AMM; "Their music is as alike or unlike as trees" In Jeph Jerman's case this rings equally and ironically true. Listening close to Sycamore Creek the sounds differ to those on Wet Beaver Creek and Red, water. Although we hear water running down a stream and our minds tell us it sounds the same, the truth when you compare the two is that they are markedly different. Maybe this level of scrutiny seems a little silly, but I find myself taking greater interest in the detail of these things.

The last piece, Puget sound and stones features a wind battered mic recording the wash of waves across a stony shoreline. Whilst this description paints pictures of tranquility and suggests the kind of new age nonsense found on yoga mediation tapes the roar of the wind ensures that this remains a bumpy ride for the listener.

One of the questions I would like to eventually ask Jeph Jerman is if he considers these kind of pieces to be music, or just presentations of sound. I am beginning to think that this kind of question is probably irrelevant to him anyway, but I would be interested to hear his thoughts.

### **Day 14 – Jeph Jerman – Harvester Ants. Autumn Records Leaves Series CDR**

This is just the disc to lay back on the bed and close your eyes to after a really tough week of work and dentistry. Its odd as I have begun to find it easier to listen to these discs with the lights either dimmed or turned off completely. There is scientific proof that the hearing ability of blind people is accentuated as they rely more on their ears than the majority of us. Whilst obviously closing my eyes does not in any way have the same effect I am finding it easier to focus my listening with other distractions removed.

Harvester Ants is another luminescent purple disc wrapped in the gorgeous Leaves series packaging. Detail on the music's creation is on the sparse side again, but I think it is safe to assume that here we have recordings of harvester ants making their way back and forth across a contact microphone.

The actual sound here is very beautiful to listen to. The distant murky hum of the street is punctuated occasionally by a vehicle passing close and overlaid by the habitual chatter of birds and the occasional barking dog. Above these sounds though sits the scratches and patter of tiny feet as the ants go about their business. These footsteps translate here as rough electronic scrabbling and miniscule bursts of static, not dissimilar to the sound of a turntable cartridge popping its way across a dusty old piece of vinyl. These little bursts of sound are continual throughout the recording, but spread apart with patches of inactivity, allowing the sounds of the big wide world to fill the spaces between. Twelve minutes in a very low aeroplane drowns out everything for a few seconds before fading away to find the ants still going about their way.

This is an incredible recording. It is really hard to relate to these sounds in any logical manner. These are sounds that normally would only be heard by a passing centipede, and as ridiculous a comment as that may appear, the reality here is that this recording places you in a microscopic soundworld on that level.

This is one field recording that serves us better than any first hand trip into the countryside could. Here the human ear is extended beyond its natural capabilities and the human brain is confused by the mixture of the familiar and the abstract. Laying listening to this in the dark is even a little disconcerting if you pay attention to the thought of what you are listening to here.

If you forget that you are listening to ants, stop trying to work out how the music is recorded and just focus on the sound coming from the speakers, this is a relaxing, gentle piece of highly detailed music that rewards the careful listener well.

#### **Day 15 - Animist Orchestra – Wu Wei Anomalous Records CD**

I have been listening to this recording on and off for a few months now, but only in the past week or so did I manage to obtain a 'real' CD of it, before now I had been listening to a CDR made from an mp3 download. The disc includes an inlay card adorned with Jerman's beautiful photography and poetic notes on the music, so I am very pleased I finally have a copy in my possession. This is also one of my favourite pieces of Jeph Jerman's music, and listening to it closely this evening was a real pleasure.

The Animist Orchestra was formed in 1999 by Jerman and some friends in Seattle in an attempt to take the natural sounds of Jerman's solo improvisations and give them more density. Six people can be heard on this beautifully recorded release, a 'real' CD on the unfortunately now defunct Anomalous Records label.

Extensive notes by Jerman on the progression of the Orchestra through to and beyond the point of this recording can be read at his site, <http://www.davidstanford.com/jerman/animist.html> so I won't repeat these details here. This though, appears to be a completely improvised performance of the Orchestra, following earlier sessions when written 'scores' were used to keep some level of focus in the music.

The music consists mainly of swathes of percussive sounds generated from bones, shells, stones, the usual Jerman fayre, but here the sounds come in clusters, pouring into earshot rather than the tentative patter of some of the solo discs. At the same time though, silence and the spaces between the music play an important part. Jerman's aim was to create a natural sound that developed its own form rather than anything built upon the virtuosity of the musicians involved. The result sounds totally organic and inhuman, it is hard to sit here listening and picture how this music was made. Without the credits on the sleeve notes it would be impossible to tell how many musicians are actually involved here, the musicians are closely focussed on the sound as a whole rather than their own contribution.

Unlike many of the other recordings I have written about here, I am finding it very difficult to paint pictures of how Wu Wei actually sounds. It has the feel of a field recording but clearly it is not. There are no 'voices' to be heard in the music, it is impossible to tell who is using what to create the sounds. There are none of the obvious call and response techniques of some improvised music, yet together the Orchestra respond to the overall sound to allow it to progress and grow.

The only part of the recording that fails for me is near the end when again someone changes the feel of the recording totally by whirling something around in the air to make a loud circular sound not unlike a motor turning over. This moment allows the human element of the recording to creep back in and it awakens you from the trance like state that the music places you in, but as it only lasts a couple of minutes near the end this can be forgiven.

In short I am lost for words to describe this recording. One thing is for sure it is a remarkably original piece of music, and something that needs listening to rather than talking about. This is one of the most fully realised examples of Jerman's improvised soundworld and is essential for anyone with even a passing interest in his music. Unfortunately it is also very difficult to lay your hands upon a copy but I recommend you commence your search.

### **Day 16 – Jeph Jerman – Four (Four) Installation Pieces**

This really is something quite special. Before explaining about the music here I need first to describe this object. Here is an old recycled heavy wooden cigar box. Still with the maker's name carved into its sides, a treasure chest style box with brass closure clips but with beautiful detailed Jerman photographs attached to the outside and inside of the hinged lid.

Also attached to the inside of the lid is a trademark scrap of paper announcing that the four CDs enclosed in the box are designed to be played simultaneously in loop mode. It also suggests that the accompanying objects in the box may be used to play along if desired.

Sure enough there are four CDRs in slimline jewel cases here, each with hand drawn pencil shapes on the cover and small notations inside written in the same abstract form as Jerman's early scores for the Animist Orchestra. The aforementioned objects in the box are a fantastic selection of stones, dried leaves, wood, bone and shells. The scrap of paper suggests that they can be used to play along if desired.

Once you get beyond the sheer beauty of this object, (I have been sat looking at it in awe for about three weeks now) the next challenge is what to do with it. Each of the discs is marked either Bones, Pine cones, Shells or Stones, and sure enough each contains recordings of only those items, all lasting about twenty seven minutes.

Playing each in turn is a nice experience. Some, such as the bones recording could stand alone as a nice piece of Jerman improvisation, but others such as the Pine cones disc feature large sections of silence before a flurry of activity that dies away into silence again.

I wanted to follow the instructions as closely as I possibly could, but I unfortunately do not own four different ways to play CDs together at any kind of sensible volume. The nearest solution I could find was to rip each of the discs to a soundfile and then merge them together in Acid Pro, a piece of music creation software sat on my PC but rarely ever used. Playing all four tracks together revealed a rich mass of sounds overlapping each other to create similarly beautiful layered washes of sound to those evident on yesterday's Animist Orchestra recording.

I found myself spending the afternoon playing with the four tracks, shifting them out of sync with each other, playing about with the volume levels and seeing what occurred if digital effects were added to the sounds. This may not have been the intention of Jerman when he put this set together but this wonderful playground of sound was too appealing to avoid. Several hours of this passed before I remembered the assorted objects still in the box, and the suggestion from Jerman they should be used to play along.

I have to admit I closed the door tight to avoid the ridicule of my younger brother, but then sat down on the floor with the combined sound files playing. You will be pleased to hear that no recorded evidence of this session exists, but I quite enjoyed myself scraping, rattling and rustling these beautiful items together to bring the whole experience alive.

I found the four tracks running together to be very dense and difficult to relate to with my own sounds, so I later played just the bones track alone whilst limiting myself to the assorted pieces of wood and dried leaves in the box. This sounded much nicer to my ears.

This is not so much a piece of music that can be measured and spoken about in the same way as the other albums in this series. Apart from being a wonderful object to own and hold in your hands it is a toolkit put together to really involve you in the art of listening to sound.

As this is the sixteenth day on the trot that I have been listening to Jeph Jerman's music I found it easy to sink into the experience of creating this music. I have no pretensions of being a musician of any kind, but this afternoon feeling enveloped by this whole world of sound was a magical experience. Tonight I took a walk in the country close to my home as I often do on a Sunday evening, yet as the weather gets colder and the leaves have begun to fall from the trees I smiled to myself tonight as it occurred to me that October is the perfect month to be spending extended time with Jeph Jerman's music.

I have no idea if any more copies of this set are available to purchase anywhere. Mine came from Erstwhile Distribution, and if they have any left I recommend you obtain one soon. This is one release that could never be reduced to a soulseek download.

### **Day 17 – Jeph Jerman – Sound (Field Recordings 1993-2003) CDR**

After yesterday's interactive extravaganza, back down to earth and the catalogue of interesting sound that it has to offer. Today's disc is a compilation of twelve short recordings taken from Jeph Jerman's collection of field recordings made over a ten year period. The recordings here vary dramatically, from short three second blasts of a static-laden voice message from the Anomalous Records answer machine, to the recording of a flagpole flapping in the wind as a siren blasting emergency vehicle passed close by.

The disc lists the tracks here before announcing that all are recorded using handheld analogue tape decks and various cheap microphones. As I sit and listen here one of the things that really strikes me is the dedication Jerman has shown to his mission to capture interesting sound, underlined here by the time span involved with the recording of these tracks.

In places Jerman 'plays' found object(s) in situ to create this music. The metal bed frame in the shed makes its reappearance, and a track titled 'window bars and light cord' is reminiscent of gamelan sounds as Jerman plays the bars as if it were a natural instrument.

One of the more interesting pieces is a recording of a dilapidated old water heater crashing and banging in on itself as it heats a new tank of water, immediately sparking memories for myself of a childhood bedroom that had a water heater immediately behind my head as I lay in bed at night. One thing these pieces of music do is evoke memories of sounds we have heard in our lives, pulling them out of the mists of memory and bringing with them images we relate to them.

The disc ends with another recording of a running stream, this time a nineteen minute capture of Frijoles Creek, New Mexico. Whilst it would be easy to dismiss these watery recordings as all very similar I find myself listening deep within again, here picking out rhythmic figures and overlapping patterns reminiscent of my experiments yesterday when I played around with speeding up the four installation piece tracks on the computer.

This is the best recording of running water yet, revealing a transparency to the sound that allows the careful listener to unwrap the sound layer by layer and reveal structure in what is an apparently random event.

### **Day 18 – Jeph Jerman – Monument Valley CDR**

I had a pretty stressful time with work today, the blood pressure was reaching all time highs and my head was pounding as I drove home, so tonight as the weather looked to be behaving itself for the first day in weeks I took the opportunity to take today's Jerman disc with me for a walk in the fields south of my house.

I have been meaning to do this since I started this project, and as today's selection, Monument Valley is made up of field recordings made outside it seemed the perfect opportunity. So I loaded up my Discman and went for a quiet stroll as darkness fell. I kept the volume at about two thirds of the maximum possible, and despite having a decent pair of headphones the outside sounds were able to permeate my hearing easily.

The first track here is quite loud, a recording of stones being shifted about in a rocky alcove. This piece was pleasant to listen to as I reached the fields and headed up an old disused railway line I often walk along, but the sounds seemed alien to the space I was walking in, and I found it hard to relate them to natural recordings as they sounded hard and brittle, again feeling electronic in their make-up.

There then followed though a series of beautiful recordings that blended with my walk perfectly. The first of these, a track simply called Wind consisted of the gentle buffeting of the microphone by an Arizona breeze. As I walked high up on the raised railway line the wind rose around me and the darkening skies turned grey, making it difficult to separate the sounds on the recording from what was happening around me.

A further track, Juniper Wind begins in similar fashion with a gentler wind filling the recording, but for the last four or five minutes of the piece this drops away to virtual silence. Having not heard the recording before I found myself listening hard for further sounds, and the gentle roar of the real wind around me forcing its way past my headphones merged into the sound, making it hard to figure out where the recorded sounds stopped and reality began. At some point an aeroplane passed overhead, maybe on the recording, maybe in real life? Only on the second play of the disc later did I find that it belonged on the recording.

Further tracks follow a similar vein, some featuring sounds of plants rustling mixed in with the consistent flurries of the wind. Track seven, entitled Walk around the mitten also contains the faint sound of footsteps treading along a dusty leaf strewn path. This threw me a little and saw me looking down at my feet, but the track I was following was made up of damp gravel, making for an odd sensation to hear these alternative footsteps instead of my own. I found myself slowing my stride slightly so I could come in line with the all too brief footsteps on the recording.

As I doubled back on myself and re-entered the town and the brightly lit but peaceful streets of my town, rain started to fall and I quickened my stride for home. At this point, track eight, which is titled Wood and is the penultimate piece on Monument Valley started up, filling my ears with the loud clatter and tumble of wood and the microphone moving about amongst it, almost signalling an end to the tranquility.

Then, as I arrived back home to find the house empty and quiet, track nine began, a gentle, quiet recording of closely miked stones being moved about the slightest fraction and the gritty clicks of smaller stones rubbing together.

This final piece is very slow and verging on silence, and I found myself sitting down in the dark at the foot of the stairs just inside the door, letting all eleven minutes unfurl themselves as I sat perfectly still taking in the moment.

It was only as it ended, and I put the lights on and picked up the sleeve for the disc I noticed the title of this last track; 'Stones at Home'

Tonight I am tired and battered after a tough day, and maybe I am over romanticising the experience of this evening's listening, having been fortunate enough to select a disc that worked well with a walk in the country, but tonight did wonders for my blood pressure and helped me focus my listening to a degree I may not have reached before.

#### **Day 19 – Jeph Jerman – Lithiary. Fargone Records CDR**

Tonight I am very tired after a very long and exhausting day sat around meeting tables. Checking the list of what I had to listen to tonight I was initially pleased to see I was writing about Lithiary, as this is the first Jeph Jerman disc I ever purchased a couple of months back and I figured I knew it well enough to not need to listen too hard.

Then I put the track on when I got home, and despite having listened to this a half dozen times or so in the past I found myself sat down quietly with it again, listening closer than I have before, and being able to place the sounds much easier.

The first thing that strikes you about Lithiary is the packaging. A plain white gatefold card sleeve has wrapped around it a gloss print of a stoney beach taken by Jerman. Grey-blue stones can be made out easily in the foreground, but stretch out into the distance, becoming blurred into one grey mass far away whilst the detail close up stays sharp. This image forms a perfect metaphor for the music contained here.

Lithiary is one long forty six minute track, based similarly to the Instability Studies disc on recordings made of the shaketable, this time loaded with a large number of stones.

The track consists of two overdubbed recordings of the shaketable from the same session. This creates a blurred, disjointed feel to the sound. The nature of the table vibrating the stones on their axis leads to a sense of movement in the music, and a feel of echo and delay as the stones settle back into place quickly, only to move again fractions of a second later.

The two tracks overlaid make it difficult to focus on individual moments or events, and as you listen for a long time into this music the source of the sounds becomes irrelevant and you begin to get lost in the mass of detail that remains constantly textured and complex, yet also has an overall hypnotic feel. The music actually made me feel a little dizzy and decentred as I became closely involved with it, although this could also have had something to do with my 15 hour working day!

To the casual listener there is little change across this recording, but deep focussed listening becomes an intense rewarding experience, as with the similar the recordings of running streams, repeated patterns, rhythms and shapes form within the sound mass.

The decision to present two shaketables overdubbed shows a distinct concession to composition here, with

Jerman taking two recordings and creating something new from them. With Lithiary Jerman has found an increased depth and an overall sense of a deep embracing cocoon of sound that can either be taken at surface value as a pleasant piece of music, or listened into closely to further reveal the immense level of detail involved here. So this disc takes one short step beyond pure field recordings by allowing the simple use of overdubbing, but otherwise there is no processing done to the recorded material.

Although there seems to be a number of releases due any day, Lithiary is I think Jerman's most recent release. As a limited run of 100 CDRs though you may have to move fast to catch one.

### **Day 20 – Jeph Jerman – Open Mics and Mini Discs 2003-2004 CDR**

I listened to this initially on the way home in the car from work this evening, tired, eyes aching and in need of some stimulation to keep me awake, and well, I guess I got it...

This is a strange Jerman release, really not what I was expecting. The first eleven tracks on Open Mics and Mini Discs contain recordings made at a place called Random acts of coffee in Sedona, Arizona. The pieces contain a lot of background noise from what sounds like a large-ish hall quite full of people of all ages, as on occasions voices can be easily made out, sometimes adult, occasionally the cries of young children.

Some of the tracks here are recordings of (presumably) Jerman playing more recognised percussion instruments. A snare drum is played in the first track, sometimes by scraping across the skin to create a tortured wail, but also at times it is played really quite traditionally, occasionally at high speed, but with rhythms easily recognisable. Other instruments appear throughout the disc, a violin makes an appearance as well as more exotic items such as a berimbau and a tongue drum. Another track though features Jerman 'playing' an amplified cactus, possibly plucking the spikes of the plant to create a tuneful percussive sound.

All of these first eleven tracks deal with an element of rhythm some how, in some places this is obvious where crude percussive patterns are evident, and at other times the rhythm is less pronounced, often hard to make out amongst the crowded recordings.

It is the background noise that really stands out here. Each of these first eleven tracks features a lot of crowd noise, chatter and movement. The background noise often consumes the music played totally, blending it all together into one mass of confused sound.

These eleven pieces have thrown me a little. I find them hard to come to grips with for a couple of reasons. Firstly I find the use of rhythm in such a simple manner to be less interesting than the loosely defined percussive feel of many of the other recordings I have heard. I also find the tracks here to be quite ugly to listen to, the sounds of human chatter coupled with the harsh clatter of the music in some of these pieces makes for very interesting but less appealing to the ear release. I found it very hard to listen closely to these first eleven pieces, the return was less rewarding than with other discs.

Tracks twelve and thirteen are just as confusing. Recorded beside Dry Beaver Creek they feature Jerman playing a fast hypnotic rhythm on what sounds like a bongo drum for a brief period of time. The second of these two tracks also features some interruptions from the billowing wind, but generally speaking the musical elements involved here are quite straightforward short drum patterns. Perhaps it is the recognisable language of the drums that is putting me off here, but I found these two pieces less interesting.

But then the final piece, track fourteen saves it all. It consists of a simple, peaceful and quiet recording made on someone called Julie's front porch. The overwhelming urge for silence covers most of the seven and a half minute track, but it never quite manages to mask the sound of the wind over the open mic, or the distant sounds of the neighbourhood that merge together to form a grey backdrop for the piece. This track is truly beautiful, a recording that lifts you up from where you are and transplants you out onto the porch of a home far away. There is no indication as to when the piece is recorded, but there is a feeling of early evening here, with the rush and energy of the day dying away and the town catching its breath.

In the context of the rest of Jerman's music I have heard so far, Open Mics... is a little bit of an anomaly, an interesting addition that has made me think again about how easily I have been able to relate to and listen closely to this music so far. The last track though is worth the entry fee alone.

### **Day 21 – Jeph Jerman – More Sound (Field Recordings 2004) CDR**

Back to more typical Jerman field recordings this evening, and some really nice relaxing listening again, but with that familiarity comes the problem of finding new or interesting things to say about this music.

Unsurprisingly, More Sound is the follow up to Sound that I listened to on Day 17. These recordings are quite recent from 2004 and the quality of the sound captured is pretty good, suggesting the use of mini disc rather than an analogue tape deck.

Like the Sound disc these are site specific field recordings taken from three different recording sessions. The first clutch of four tracks are very appealing. Recorded at a place called Red tank draw they open with a piece called Water (carp) which features a constant drip and trickle of water sounds that have a distinctly clockwork feel. I am not sure where the carp come into the equation as the only content seems to be that endlessly revolving water with very occasional birdsong and passing vehicles to remind you that you are listening to a field recording. Near the end of the six and a half minute track there is a brief flurry in the water and the dripping sounds halt, leaving just the twitter of the birds to end the recording in quite charming manner.

Birds can be heard in the distance on the second track, but they are on the whole shoved into the background here by the up close and unmistakable sound of a swarm of bees buzzing about the microphone. This is quite remarkable to listen to, taking on a similar feel to the Harvester Ants disc, placing your ears into a position they are unlikely to be familiar with and leaving your brain to sort out the messages it receives. The bees seem to rush past the microphone, occasionally coming so close that their sound booms out of the mix.

'Bees' is followed without a pause by the third track 'Flies' which as the more astute may work out, is a similar recording of flies buzzing about the mic. The obvious questions about how on earth these recordings were set up and captured are forgotten if you are able to really focus on the sounds here. The flies provide either a swarming hum in the background or they assault the recording aggressively, making for an occasionally alarming recording that is difficult to listen to without feeling in some way under attack.

Interestingly though, I find myself remarking to myself subconsciously how different the two insects sound, how the flies have a harsher edge to their buzzing, compared to the more streamlined hum of the bees.

Track four, 'Leaf' is very short, a short passage of clicks and thuds as presumably a leaf is brought somehow to bear on the microphone.

Track five is the only track here recorded at home. 'Rain amp' is rather beautiful, the sound of rain pattering against a hard surface (maybe an amplifier?) outside again with the chatter of birds and the swoop of aircraft to keep the recording in its context. As the twelve minute track moves on the rain slowly subsides until it is cut viciously short in customary Jerman manner.

The last four tracks, recorded somewhere called Cornville are a varied bag. The first, mysteriously titled Vif one (Bill Gray Rd) is a ten minute long series of crunchy, uneven static that reminds me of the stark abrasive textures sometimes produced by Mark Wastell and others working in an EAI context. It is hard to place this track's origins as it is abstracted to such a degree but it is pleasing to the ear and works well offsetting the warm melancholic feel of the preceding piece.

Oak creek pipe is a long eighteen minute piece featuring drunken, askew water sounds filtered through a pipe. I find this track a little harder to enjoy, the hard springy sounds are recorded closely and vary little, making it difficult to maintain concentration across the lengthy duration.

Cornville Bridge however, the penultimate track on the disc is an inspired work. It seems to be a recording made (I am guessing) underneath a bridge that contains some sort of flaw in the road that causes a popping noise every time a car passes over. The bridge is quite busy and the road vibrates smoothly as a car approaches, barks out the inevitable pop when it reaches the centre, and then dies away gently again.

This recording sounds very musical, not ever suggesting rhythm as the cars are spaced apart erratically but containing an odd structure that makes it easy to forget the true context of the recording and listen to this as pure sound.

The final short track, Windmill Park is equally charming. Initially only the subsonic ripples of the wind can be heard, until a distant whining machinery can be heard. I am guessing this is the arms of the windmill turning, adding a repetitive circular squealing to the bass notes of the wind. This track hints at the constant tension that occurs when manmade structures meet with the forces of nature but shows that together they can work in harmony to create something beautiful.

The recordings on More Sound are the work of a wonderfully attentive ear. I am beginning to take the selection of sounds for granted with Jerman's work, but it is important to stop and remember that before the record button is pressed, these sounds have already been witnessed with the naked ear and selected to be captured for posterity. That selection process takes great skill and creativity, and this disc is one of the best examples.

**Day 22 – Jeph Jerman – Sound in Rooms, Seattle Nov 15th 1996, Jan 11th 1997. CDR**

**“This is electronic music. I have already created everything. There are no interpreters here tonight. Do not worry about how this music is made. I suggest you close the eyes and just listen”**

~Karlheinz Stockhausen, introducing Kontakte on stage in London this evening, 22.10.05

I chose to listen to and write about today's Jeph Jerman disc whilst making the journey home from the above Stockhausen performance that took place in the main hall of the old Billingsgate fish market on the north bank of the Thames in Central London.

This isn't a Stockhausen review, so I will not talk about the music at the concert, but it is important to mention the way I felt upon leaving the hall.

There must have been verging on a thousand people sat silently and motionless in darkness with nothing to see for nearly two hours this evening. The nature of the performance left us with nothing to do but listen. The silent attention of so many people in one space at one time was really quite remarkable, its been a long while since I last witnessed this on such a scale.

So as I joined the throng of people filing from the building my ears were already finely tuned to what was happening around me and my attention was pretty much focussed aurally. I put on my headphones and started to play Sound in Rooms, Seattle at full volume during the slow shuffle towards the street.

The immediate blast of tape hiss filled my ears for a second, taking my full attention until my brain had a chance to process everything thrown at it at once and the excited chatter of the departing audience merged back in around me. As I fell out onto the busy street the sounds around me pushed Jerman into the background. His pattern of chinking stones or shells pin-pricked the background as the persistent tape hiss fought with the roar of the passing late traffic, night buses clattering over loose manhole covers and a chorus of diesel taxi engines turning over together as they wait at a red light.

The intimacy and restraint of the first track of the three on this recording became evident for the first time as I turned a corner into a back street and headed into London's financial district, but this was short lived as I passed a wine bar with an open front and the thud of bad dance music and the throb of chatter mixed with random laughter took front stage for a few moments.

Moving on towards the tube station the music on the CD fills my ears again as I walk along streets lined with the shining headquarters of various banking corporations, fallen deadly silent at the weekend, waiting for someone to press the Play button again on Monday morning. A tiny clattering of ceramic sounding objects blends into the distant hum of the city, with only a stray car passing by during a momentary break in Jerman's playing, almost providing counterpoint to his finely detailed sound world.

As I drop down the stairs leading into the tube station the city dies away and for a few moments the music only has to compete with the echo of my footsteps around the tiled walls before I turn a corner and join a small crowd of people lead by a quiet chatter of Spanish conversation as we board the escalator.

The first track comes to an end as I take a seat on the platform and a moment's silence breaks through before the second track starts up and the tape noise returns. This second piece emerges as patterns of dry chiming clusters, perhaps pieces of glass or pottery being knocked together, for a brief moment giving me a flashback to an old out of tune windchime an ex girlfriend had hanging above her back door.

These gentle but continual patterns continue to take my attention until suddenly everything is consumed by the tumultuous arrival of my train into the platform. For the next 20 minutes the music on the CD is left gasping for air as a distant crackle amongst the thunder of the train across the tracks, the irritating computerised station announcements and the laughter of a bunch of drunken club goers along the carriage.

It is whilst sat here on the tube train that I realise that I remember very little visually about the walk from the concert hall, my concentration having been taken up with the documentation of aural events. It seems to me that we listen better and remain focussed easier if we shut out the other outside stimuli provided by our rival senses.

One thing I did remember on the way out of the venue was a woman that had stopped walking and stood motionless whilst talking on a mobile phone. Are we able to listen better if we do not trouble our brain with unnecessary motion? If we follow Maestro Stockhausen's instructions and close our eyes at a concert do we listen more attentively? Can we strain our ears harder to listen closer? Or do we listen the same, but simplify the messages to our brain by shutting out the other four senses?

After leaving the tube train at Paddington the music in my ears suddenly bursts back into my attentions, partly because the sound of the train is swallowed up by the tunnel behind me, and partially because as track three begins Jerman turns again to the loud whirring noises he creates by moving something hollow in a circular movement through the air.

This sound is loud and for a short while quite jarring, the rhythmic motion interplaying with the screech of a tired escalator that takes me up to the massive mainline railway station above.

Noting that a train is due to leave very soon I walk fast across the concourse with the sound of my own blood rushing through my veins filling my ears as Jerman's music dies away to a near silent rustle of wood and leaves. I listen to the last eight minutes of this lovely piece of music as the train pulls out of London and I push the headphones firmly into my ears to give the music a chance against the clamour of the train charging across the tracks.

I nearly make it right the way through the disc again before I get off the train at my town. Immediately as I leave the station building the music becomes all encompassing again as I walk across the completely empty car park. I sit in the peace of my car without turning on the engine and hear out the last five minutes of the disc as a nice scraping sound similar to tape being pulled from a rough surface mixes with a gentle jingling of what sounds like shells.

I am now home and *Sound in Rooms, Seattle* is playing softly in the background as I type. In a moment I will turn off the CD player, silence the computer and allow my ears to settle on the sounds of an empty house at two o'clock in the morning, their job well done for tonight.

### **Day 23 – Hands To – Flatline CDR**

*Hands To* is a name used by Jeph Jerman between 1987 and approximately 1999. This CDR is a re-release by Jerman of an old *Hands To* cassette tape release from 1989. The music on *Flatline* is a distance away from the finely tuned approach to music and sound he has developed in recent years, but it is nevertheless an interesting and slightly unsettling disc to listen to.

Amongst the brief notes printed in ridiculously small type on a scrap of paper inside the jewel case Jerman explains that the title makes reference to two meanings for the term flatline. As a musical term it describes a perfectly smooth, constant sound, the like of which can never be found naturally. In medical terms flatline refers to the single straight line seen on a hospital monitor screen when a person has passed away. According to the notes, the sixteen tracks here are attempts by Jerman to 'flatline' sounds made by, or associated with people no longer living.

I first heard this disc driving home from work this afternoon, slipping the CD into the player whilst moving and therefore paying no attention to the microscopic notes inside the case. My first impressions were favourable, although not overly so, placing all of my judgement in the sound alone as I have become accustomed to doing with Jerman's work.

*Flatline* resembles to some degree much of the early dark ambient sounds that were just beginning to flourish at the end of the eighties, and the influence of the early Industrial cassette tape scenes seems to be present here. At the same time though there is a stripped down simplicity to the music. In some places, such as the cloudy lo-fi looping drones of track twelve there is nothing happening beyond this sound.

Once home and after reading the notes the music takes on a more uncomfortable feel. In places voices can be heard, often distorted into incomprehension, occasionally able to be understood, but never for very long. Most of the sounds are reduced to slowly revolving loops of low grade murmuring drift, developing little over their course.

Around this time Jerman was recording straight to tape without the luxury of four track using a primitive

sampler and tape loops to create this music. The recording quality is therefore not the best, but the murkiness of the sound adds to the overall feel of the recording.

Jerman states in the notes that these are not musical compositions, more experiments designed to express the characteristics and feelings he held of the people from whom the sounds originate. Listening through a few times after reading the notes I can sense a strong emotive feel to the recordings, but it interests me that without knowing this context I did not feel the same. The sounds are on the whole bleak and austere, the emotions this disc project to me are not positive ones, but perhaps this was the intention.

I also find it interesting that despite the statement distancing these pieces from composition, they generally contain more musical structure than the later works. Some of the tracks on Flatline have discernable openings and 'real' endings to them, fades etc, rather than the more familiar practice of just pressing the stop button on the tape deck.

In many ways my eventual approach to this disc has been the opposite of my experiences listening to more recent Jerman works. Throughout this month I have slowly learnt to try and remove all context and preconceived understanding of the sounds I listen to, focussing purely on the sound, its detail, its inherent beauty and how it blends with the environment that surrounds me. With Flatline however this 'music' took on a much deeper meaning for me only after I had read the liner notes and some clarity was given to the context of the recording. This difference has seen me alter my approach to this music dramatically.

Flatline is a deeply involved, subtle work that stands the test of time very well but seems different enough in its approach and frame of reference to suggest it is a separate project with very different aims to Jerman's output from recent years.

#### **Day 24 – Jeph Jerman – Soundhouse 2 CDR**

I have noticed that when I am tired I do not have a problem listening to music in an attentive manner, but I seem to have real problems sitting and typing my thoughts on them afterwards. Tonight I am seriously tired yet again after a very long tough day so we shall see how this goes...

The first two pieces on today's disc Soundhouse 2 continue where Soundhouse 1 left off right back on day 1. They are described as recordings made of a window amp installation, which is a bit of a mystery to me, but on this first track at least it sounds like a microphone has been left beside an open window.

That said, listening closer reveals something more buried amongst the ambient sounds of everyday life in Cottonwood, Arizona. There are patterns of rotating wooden sounds also to be heard here in between the ceaseless chatter of tress full of exotic sounding birds and the far off drone of a busy road. These wooden sounds merge seamlessly into the overall audio picture, but they do not belong there as such. I am not sure how this recording was made, but it is possible that the 'installation' involved a tape playing of pre-recorded material beside the microphone as it captures the outside world. This is my guess anyway.

The natural effect of this first piece is to make the listener challenge every sound and wonder about its origins. The easy way out of being able to merely accept this as a field recording of Jeph's back porch is not possible and I find myself trying to decode every rustle, and second guess every sound I think I can easily recognise. I have really had to force myself to stop making these distinctions and just enjoy the act of listening to the sounds coming from my speakers.

The second track appears to be similarly made (I really must stress that I don't have a clue and am making educated guesses here) but the window seems to be shut for this second piece as cars can be heard passing and the birds singing, but in a very muffled distant manner.

The main sounds in the piece seem to be made up of a recording of water dripping and the sound of heavy winds passing through piping of some type, but again I am not sure how correct I am or what is recording and what is not. This piece is at the end of the day very nice to listen to, on the surface very simple and made up of two basic elements, but close listening reveals all kind of subtle nuances and familiar sounds, at one point footsteps on uncertain floorboards can be heard approaching, followed by a brittle rustling of something like a sweet wrapper before all falls silent again.

At eleven minutes something electric is turned on nearby that emits a low soft hum and then a small collection of stones are rattled about, blending with the sound of the wind and the drips of water, further confusing this listener over which sounds were on tape and which were recorded 'real time'.

Three quarters of the way through this rather extraordinary half an hour long piece human activity is obvious again as someone moves about the room, loud bangs suggest windows being closed and doors shut tightly, but these sounds all just become part of the whole.

There then follows a series of very brief 'tracks' made up of fragments taken from Jerman's telephone answering machine. These parts feature the recordings left by callers and the musical answering message left by Jerman for those that call. The only message left intact long enough to really decipher tells the sad tale of someone that had organised and played an Animist Orchestra performance without Jeph, but was pretty disappointed with the result, and his fellow performer's inability to really listen. I am not sure about the purpose of these pieces, they do little for me beyond providing me with a subtle reminder to listen that little bit more carefully!

The final twenty four minute piece returns to the pattern of the first two tracks. The same revolving wooden sound can be heard behind the sound of some pretty persistent birds, (I am tempted to say that this track sounds like early evening in comparison to the afternoon sounds of track 1 but again I may be wrong) At just after the eight minute mark the sounds of the birds cut out instantly, suggesting that either the window has been closed or the tape has been stopped. I would suspect the former. The sounds that remain are similar to those in track 2, disembodied rustling over the microphone suggests the wind and the looping wooden sounds remain.

With ten minutes remaining one of the humming sounds in the background cuts out and the remaining elements become more sparse, clusters of wooden clatter and the wind-like distortion are all that remain. Eventually the sounds all die away leaving a quiet mechanical hum that could be just be the recorder capturing its own mechanisms remains before things cut dead again and the CD ends.

So here I have just found myself trying to describe how this music sounds in words again. This is my natural response when tired, and shows why it is probably not a good idea to try and write a new review every evening. This has been an intriguing and confusing, but ultimately rewarding piece of music to listen to. I would be interested to hear if others are familiar with this disc and if they had really stopped to wonder about the sounds involved and how much they all belonged together.

#### **Day 25 – Jeph Jerman & Greg Davis – Memorial Day Autumn Records Leaves Series CDR**

Obviously Greg Davis has been following this series of reviews and adding helpful insight here and there to my guesswork, but I hope people reading this will realise that if I did not enjoy a recording of his work I wouldn't have a problem explaining why not in a constructive and honest manner here. As it happens I don't need to worry, this is a fine recording that betters the very strong Cottonwood, Arizona disc from Day 4.

Nicely recorded in May 2004 outside the front of Jeph's house in Arizona, the first thing that grabs me here is the missing tape hiss, allowing the negative shapes between the streams of tiny events here to really stand out, the gentle twittering of birds in the trees the only background to this delightful improvised music.

And this really is music, instant composition created by the two musicians with remarkable control and dexterity considering the 'instruments' involved in its making. The Autumn website gives a brief but revealing description of how the music is made, the early parts of the recording are focused on friction sounds as the surfaces of assorted objects are rubbed against each other, and the later parts created remarkably by rubbing the end of long walking sticks against the front windows of the house...

I adore the intimacy of this music. Here we have minute events and everyday inconsequential percussive sounds collaged together in real time to create a finely detailed undulating sound world that pulls you in and involves you in the story it has to tell. The music is slow and careful in places, tumbling excitedly in others, but it works superbly as a whole, and ending at just the right moment, which unfortunately comes after only twenty one minutes.

There is no way you can tell who is making what sound, only during the walking stick moments late on is it easy to identify the number of musicians involved. There is a great respect for the items used to make sound here, I imagine that the precise sound made is not easy to predict when working with 'instruments' of this type. I can draw parallels between Jerman and Davis' work on this disc and the improvising laptop musician that feeds a sound through a software patch mid performance, knowing vaguely how the result will sound, but often surprised by the result, throwing the improvisation off in another direction.

This disc is pleasing for me as it is concerned with textures and sound rather than instruments and

musicians. There is a feeling of playfulness and discovery throughout the recording that sits happily alongside the obvious musicianship of the two creators.

In places I am reminded of the textural experiments of Otomo Yoshihide's turntable work or Mark Wastell's amplified textures, but also for some reason the jovial yet powerfully emotive music of John Stevens suggests itself. Then halfway through the disc the sound of the birds filters into earshot, and I am reminded of the source of these sounds and the true originality of this music.

I said early on in this project that I thought Jeph Jerman's music could be divided into two, on one hand the straight field recordings, presenting sounds in a new context to be listened to with new ears, and on the other the improvisation of pieces like Memorial Day, where music is constructed using the potential provided by the natural objects involved.

I have noted that in places there is some blurring between these two generalisations, but they are basically still in place for me. I have gained great enjoyment from both sections of the music, but with Memorial Day and one or two other discs before it I am finding the most enjoyment from the latter categorisation.

It was noted with amusement by someone I was chatting with recently that I have a tendency to end these little reviews with a sales pitch urging you to go buy the disc. As the disc starts again for the seventh time this evening on repeat play I have no qualms about doing so again...

### **Day 26 – Jeph Jerman – Derelict 2. CDR**

So tonight we have the second Derelict disc, following the rather nice first volume listened to on Day 11. There are four derelict 'sites' for the field recordings here, an old disused gas station, an abandoned mine, an old stage station (whatever one of those may be) and the Red Tank Draw we heard recently on the More Sound release.

The pieces are numerous and it is not identified where each is recorded, so I chose to try and forget trying to identify the sounds here, or compare one short track to another, and instead give an overview of how this music sounds, and the atmospheres and emotions it suggests.

The beginning of Derelict 2 contains a lot of short pieces that merge together easily so you barely notice the track counter has clicked over. These pieces are sparse in their make up, featuring the continual roar of cars passing on a nearby road, but low enough in the recording to just settle as a background to the piece, a somehow comforting hum and swell of sounds familiar to all of us that immediately provide the music with a context in which it can be heard. Above this there are scrapes and soft metallic moans that are made by Jerman and become part of the soundscape.

Knowing the site of these recordings tends to cloud the way I listen to and consequently feel about this music. The initial pieces particularly feel stark, empty and austere, but how much of this comes from the feelings imparted by the music and how much is my brain taking its expectations and laying them over what I hear is hard to tell.

Later the music becomes fuller and louder, the sense of echo and emptiness remains in these parts from the early tracks, but deep drones of stroked metal envelop the recording for a while, adding body and depth to the recordings, but perhaps losing some of the charged emptiness of the earlier pieces.

A little later on and we hear stones, wood and small pieces of loose debris being moved about up close to the mic, but in the rear of the recording we have deathly quiet, reinforcing the feeling of empty yet enclosed spaces.

This is then turned on its head as we hit track sixteen and the wind flies into the recording from the first clumsy release of the pause button, whooshing over the naked microphone, and reminding me of my early Sunday morning walks up in the hills of the English Ridgeway, unprotected from the elements but fully protected from the hustle of everyday life.

It turns out this track is where the CD ends. I have really struggled listening through this and also then trying to write about it without making reference to the source of the sounds. In fact I find it close to impossible. Force of habit and the everyday way my mind works forces me to place each piece of music, identifying its origins rather than just enjoying the sound.

In many ways I wish this had been played to me blind, without knowledge of even the title to see if I was capable of listening with an open mind to sounds rather than recordings of objects, but I have a feeling that under any circumstances this is close to impossible.

### **Day 27 – Jeph Jerman – Chin (Progress) CDR**

The title of this CDR comes from the 35th Hexagram from the I Ching. Not professing to have any real understanding of the I Ching (something I hope one day to correct) I will not pass any comment on why this title should be chosen. Perhaps others could shed some light?

Chin (Progress) is a series of mainly short recordings of music 'played' on or field recordings of, plants of one description or another. We hear the stalks, branches and spines of assorted yucca, prickly pear, sotol and agave plants plucked, struck, rubbed, dropped, blown through and vibrated amongst a host of other ways to coax sounds from the exotic foliage of the Arizona desert.

Again here though, the faintly ridiculous nature of the above paragraph only really matters if you know the source of these sounds. Without that knowledge the listener would assume here we have some form of obscure percussion, perhaps treated electronically to a degree. The last couple of tracks feature more obvious use of the plants as hollow agave stalks seem to be blown through in a primitive flute – like manner.

At first listen I told myself yet again that I couldn't believe these pieces were recorded using natural objects, and that it didn't sound at all like plants were used in their creation. But then I thought to myself, I have absolutely no idea what the sound of a rubbed and plucked yucca plant would be like, so where am I getting these assumptions from?

I suspect that one of the objectives of this music is to reveal the musical possibilities of beautiful natural objects that are sat before us. Well, sat before Jeph Jerman at least, not too many Prickly Pear plants around here.

In places the music is very nice, tracks ten and eleven resemble the sound of hundreds of tiny marbles tumbling down a marble staircase, though the hard to translate tracklisting makes it hard to figure out what we are actually hearing here.

Track twelve sounds like a hippopotamus snoring happily in the bath tub whilst a series of insects bounce off of the light bulb above. OK, an obscure reference, but that's half the point here, we could be listening to anything, as we have never truly stopped and listened to the sounds around us in this way.

Musically, Chin (Progress) holds less appeal for me than the likes of the Animist Orchestra recording or the duets with Greg Davis, there is less of the deliberate musicality and interaction of those discs, but as a vehicle to make me sit quietly and wonder at what sounds we are really all missing in the world about us, this works a treat.

### **Day 28 – Jeph Jerman – Grackles (Track from Xing – Wu Compilation)**

As I said at the beginning, the original idea for this series sprung out of the fact I bought a pile of twenty four Jeph Jerman discs from Erstwhile Distribution and was wondering how to approach listening to them. When I decided on this project I had to pad out the remaining seven days of the month with Jerman discs I already owned. As I didn't quite have enough full length discs I decided to use MP3 files of two albums I had downloaded from soulseek for the two days I was missing.

However, having reached the point that I was due to play these (coincidence placed them both in the last four days) I do not feel comfortable doing this, as the quality of the recordings is not good, and I do not feel confident enough that what I am hearing is what will have been presented on the original recording. When I began this project an issue like this would not have mattered to me. Having spent so much time listening so closely, I feel I need a better solution.

So I have decided to use two Jerman tracks from compilation discs I own for tonight's and Sunday's entries instead. These tracks may be short but warrant close listening the same as the others, and the shorter tracks give me space to think more about the experience of this month in general.

Grackles comes from the hard to find but well worth seeking out two disc compilation Insight on the fledgling Malaysian label Xing-Wu. This is a recording of a crowd of birds (presumably called grackles) that accumulate once a year in Jerman's home town in large numbers. This five and a half minute recording was

made of a bunch of birds that assembled on a telephone wire near his home.

Its hard to tell how many birds are involved here, but I sense several dozen as we are presented with an immediate wall of sound made up of masses of high pitched short squeals layered across each other to create the impression of one long repetitive drone.

Interestingly, the piece again resembles the recordings of running streams visited earlier in the month when you listen closely into the sound. The hundreds of single cries from the birds coalesce into the whole, but like the rushing water recordings if you forget the source of the recording and just listen deep into the morass of sound you can make out three or four different elements. Bird cries at different pitches and lengths underpinned by the faint sounds of the road here replace the different percussive sounds from the water.

Listening to this piece as a recording of some birds on a telephone wire has its worth, but closing your mind to that and simply listening to sounds rather than the call of grackles opens this piece up as a highly intricate collage of hundreds of similar yet never identical moments. The impression you are left with is off something created by a computer, the sounds take on an electronic feel as the 'composition' could never been performed in any way by a human hand.

This thought reminded me of an old Invisible Jukebox article in *The Wire* magazine. In this feature a musician or composer is played music blind and asked to identify the work and then pass comment on it. I remember someone (I honestly don't remember who, I could look it up, but it really doesn't matter) being played a recording of some seals roaring on a beach, taken from the somewhat eclectic BBS Radio Mixing It compilation from about ten years ago. The person identified the sounds as coming from some kind of 1960s electronic experimental composition, or words to that effect.

I mention this as I have often felt this way about Jerman's field recordings. It is possibly just because of my listening background that is grounded in acoustic and electronic sounds worked together that I think this way, but I often have been able to transcend the subject matter of these field recordings and approach them as pieces of incidental composition, often with an electronic feel to the sounds.

Grackles begins disc two of the *Insight* compilation, crashing in without warning as with all of Jeph's own releases, but interestingly it fades away here at the end rather than just coming to a dead halt, presumably at the instruction of the CD's compiler. This simple difference stands out for me against the other pieces I have listened to, suggesting here that this should be considered as a piece of art in itself rather than just a presentation of recorded sound.

I guess after listening to this kind of thing for a month the slightest difference suggests a big difference...

#### **Day 29 – Jeph Jerman – Sound in Rooms KCMU Seattle 05.09.98, WFMU New Jersey 07.20.04 CDR**

Here we have yet another great example of Jeph Jerman's skill as an improviser, taking objects from nature and producing sounds from them with a deftness of touch and an ear for detail to rival anyone. Yet he goes about his way on these recordings in an understated manner, often allowing the objects he is playing to dictate their own sounds, allowing gravity to play its part as heavy objects rock on their axis, and the element of chance to dictate how handfuls of stones and shells rubbed together will sound.

These tracks come from two radio broadcasts. The first dating from 1998 is from a Washington University radio station and the second was recorded six years later for WFMU, an interesting looking arts station in New Jersey. At one point at the start of a track a snippet of a DY is heard for a brief moment. I'm not sure if this was left in deliberately for a reason, or merely because it doesn't actually matter that it is there.

The music on all nine pieces is generally on the quiet side here. Track five contains the best use of the 'Branch swished through the air' technique I have heard, used here with a good sense of precision and with the sound made adjusted by throwing the branch through the air at different speeds. Track six features the agitated objects mentioned above that are closely recorded vibrating slowly to a halt as they come to rest. The cumulative effect here is of deep and obvious echo treatments being applied to the sounds, but there are no artificial effects used here.

The ninth and last track here is particularly enjoyable, lasting twenty three minutes it is possibly the entire recording from the New Jersey broadcast. Whilst much of the method used here to create music and the raw materials involved may not have changed six years after the first pieces, there is a tightness and confidence that can be heard in the presentation of the sounds. Jerman focusses mainly on rustling and scraping together a collection of the usual items, stones, wood and shells, beginning in quite a sparse manner, but

later building into a louder and denser rattle of some force. Near the end of the track the sounds move gradually towards the wooden objects until with five minutes remaining there is just a storm of tiny wooden clatter. This last track is easily the stand out piece on the CD.

I am probably failing my ears by saying there is little in this disc I have not discussed before, it is hard to find new ways of describing Jerman's intimate involvement with nature and his manner of making music. However whilst my listening abilities and more importantly my failings as a writer struggle to relay the enjoyment of listening to this disc tonight, I can assure you it is amongst the best examples of Jerman's solo improvisation, with the last track itself worth the entrance fee alone.

**Day 30 – Jeph Jerman – Mam – a – gah**  
**(Track from the compilation The Sound of Nature, The Nature of sound)**  
**Kaon Ingeos CD**

This eight minute piece is really quite stunningly beautiful. Taken from the rather nice Kaon compilation that features recordings from Francisco Lopez, Seth Nehil, Mnortham amongst others, Mam-a-gah is easily my favourite track on the album.

A brief google search reveals Mam-a-gah to be the name of a picnic site in the Saguaro National Park, Arizona, where this was recorded. Fading in, the music instantly reveals a hauntingly beautiful moaning wind, sounding almost artificial in its qualities, such is the clarity of the recording. This low, mournful wail resembles the chilling sound of the Second World War air raid sirens that brought London to a standstill, and creates a mental image in my head of a massive open but totally deserted space.

Just above this wavering drone sits a further sound from the wind, this time a closer, high pitched whisper as it makes its way in between objects close by. These two sounds are constant, but always changing, creating a decentred, queasy feel as they wobble a little here and there as the wind rises and falls.

The third and final element to the sound is a solitary gentle scraping of something that sounds metallic, but could just be stone or porcelain, close to the microphone but not so loud as to dominate the recording in any way. This sound flickers in and out, resembling the lid of a china teapot being seated into its place over and over. It is hard to tell if this additional element is 'played' as such by Jerman or if it is just something caught in the wind, but it adds the finishing touch to the 'composition'.

This is easily the best recorded of all of Jerman's field recordings I have heard, the sounds are vividly real and it is a great shame that the piece lasts only eight minutes. I have settled for playing Mam-a-gah many times this evening on repeat play mode, the fade in and out at the beginning and end of the piece spoiling the effect here though.

So tomorrow is the last day of October and it will feature probably Jeph Jerman's best known release, The Second Attention. Watching the pile of discs to play go down throughout the month to be left with that single disc has presented me with mixed feelings. One part of me will be overjoyed at not having to sit and type here every evening, another part will miss the process of listening to this constantly fascinating music and trying to understand it and how it affects me in my own little way. One thing is for sure I will continue to seek out Jerman's music and I hope it continues to come thick and fast.

**Day 31 – Jeph Jerman – The Second Attention Anomalous Records CD**

And so to the final disc of the month, and also Jerman's most widely known release, The Second Attention. I have a vague understanding of the Second Attention as being a shamanic theory of the human mind's ability to transcend the mundane happenings that surround us every day, the ability to be aware of something more than what seems immediately obvious. My understanding here may be a little off the mark, but all the same this seems a good analogy for Jeph Jerman's music.

A 'real' CD on the Anomalous label, I have owned this recording for a little while, and to a degree I consider it to be the ideal starting point for someone interested in hearing Jerman for the first time, as it contains elements of all of his different improvisational approaches, tying them all together in one beautifully recorded and carefully sculpted composition.

In places The Second Attention is highly musical. There is a flowing, poetic feel to the recording in places that is less obvious on other recordings. The sounds involved move through phases, from the delicate scraping of stones to bold percussive figures to virtually silent moments when all that can be heard seems to

be a single drip of water. This is for me Jerman's solo masterwork, utilising the superior recording facilities of the studio to truly capture every last intricacy of these sounds.

In general the music is sparse, allowing the charged silence in the room to play a major role, until the last moments of this last disc when I had to smile a wry smile as Jerman reintroduces the 'branch swished through the air' technique again to bring the recording to a resounding close.

For some reason I feel I do not need to describe this music to you now. The Second Attention is simply a fine presentation of Jeph Jerman's remarkable ability to behold, capture and re-present beautiful sounds. Trying to fit this music into the strait jacket of language seems now the wrong thing to do. If The Second Attention is the best single representation of Jeph Jerman's solo music then the wisest suggestion I can make is that you try and find a copy and just listen...

Between the beautiful photographs that adorn the CD booklet lie two short quotes chosen by Jerman. The first is drawn predictably from the words of John Cage, but the second, a few lines from David Bohm seemed to be an apt way to end here;

**“What interferes with listening... is that thought jumps in very fast with a word and all its associations, which goes so fast that thought takes that to be direct perception”**

This may be the last review of the month, but I personally feel this is the start of a new approach to how I listen to not just recordings of music, but also the world around me. I hope this series has been of some interest to at least a few readers, thanks to anyone that has followed me through to the end, I hope that maybe a few more Jerman discs have sold to a few new listeners. I plan to finalise my thoughts on this whole experience soon, perhaps in the shape of a more 'formal' piece at Bagatellen, and I hope to (finally) speak with Jeph as well.

For now though, I'm just hitting the Repeat button on the CD player.