

structure and the combination of found/ treated sounds on "Smell" are also prescient.

The weaving guitars of "Our Likeness" are reminiscent of The Durutti Column while the expansive "Spring" sounds like a darker version of late Talk Talk. Phew adopts a gothic mode for the closing ballad "Ocean", sing-speaking over a dramatic parade of reverbing guitars, death march drums and what sounds like a distant car crash. One can imagine it being effectively repurposed by David Lynch.

"Depth Of The Forehead" is a strange hard rock track that sounds like it's slowly melting at the edges. This heaviness is also present on "Being" which juxtaposes pastoral sounds with metal guitars in the starkest example of the gleeful genre-hopping that Phew was enjoying at the time. The only real clue to the album's era of origin is the distinctly 1990s guitar sound on "Expression" – perhaps also the only song here that has dated poorly.

Cohesion isn't expected or necessarily desired from such a wide-ranging album, but there's something alchemical about the way all its disparate elements are connected. It's also all presided over by the voice of Phew, switching modes to match the environments in compelling narration.

Claire Biddles

Andrew Poppy

Ark Hive Of A Live

False Walls 4xCD+Pbk/DL

The composer has kindly provided us with the perfect tag. Andrew Poppy maintains that *Ark Hive Of A Live* more closely resembles John Cage's *Roaratorio* than it does Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, though the very fact he has mentioned both allows us to find common characteristics. The animating spirit is Poppy's protean musical imagination, as light as wings beating one moment, thunderous and dark the next. He has long resembled the sorcerer's apprentice of contemporary music, setting in motion wave after wave of dancing figures that threaten to overrun our ability to process them; these days, of course, he's the sorcerer as well, able to calm the chaos with a flick of the finger. And with that glorious hair, he looks like a mage too.

The Joycean spirit – *Roaratorio* was a sonic realisation of *Finnegans Wake* – is evident in the wordplay of the title. For this

is a buzzing "Ark Hive", older pieces saved two by two from the flood all the other apprentices have set in motion. It's not just an archive, compilation or best of. It is the record "Of A Live", following the trajectory of Poppy's composing life from his Lost Jockey days to the present, but in the form of otherwise unreleased works caught in live performance and gently transformed in the editing suite into the components of four well-shaped albums.

The themes are set out clearly enough. *Volume One* is mostly orchestra plus soloist; *Two* is vocal pieces; *Three* is music written for independent ensembles; *Four* explores the electroacoustic borderlands. "Attempt At An Ecstatic Moment", with its rising Mahlerian horn figure, is a perfect early example of how Poppy frames his music with self-dissolving irony, for there's nothing of the attempt, essay or esquisse about it. The ecstatic moment is delivered, confirming a composer who clearly spent his early years listening to the *Resurrection Symphony* and *The Rite Of Spring* as much as he did to Cream doing "Sittin' On Top Of The World".

Blues, jazz, classical, minimalism are all tightly bunched in the work, but neither eclectically nor amateurishly. The polish of Poppy's music has always been its most impressive feature. "This Language Buys Ice Cream", one of the vocal pieces, finds a place between German art song, cabaret music and later Talk Talk. And you can keep on finding such accidental hybrids, or more accurately a whole new island fauna, for Poppy's music is like Madagascar – you discover species there you don't find anywhere else.

Finnegans Wake is a decent model for this astonishingly lively archive, but *Ulysses* is probably better. One man's life, compressed into a day full of siren songs, argumentative encounters and a throbbingly erotic subtext.

Brian Morton

Unwound

Unwound

Numero Group DL/LP

The glowing reputation enjoyed by Olympia, Washington outfit Unwound is both well-deserved and a miracle. In the 1990s, they were simply *around* – one of several American bands surfing the post-hardcore wave. Their

presence was less about being better than everyone else, and more about contributing to a DIY community skeptical of mainstream politics and culture. Unwound toured incessantly, especially on the West Coast, and going to shows felt like hanging out at your friend's house. Yet the group's implosion in 2001, months after releasing their masterwork *Leaves Turned Inside You*, as well as bassist Vern Rumsey's death in 2020, forced everyone to reckon with the loss of an exceptionally talented band who clearly stood out from their peers, even if fans had been hesitant to acknowledge that.

Numero Group has been reissuing Unwound's catalogue since the 2013 box set *Kid Is Gone*. A fresh edition of their 1995 self-titled album arrives as surviving members Justin Trosper and Sara Lund have announced a new tour for all the emo and screamo kids who didn't see them the first time around. Out of the band's seven albums, *Unwound* is arguably the oddest duck. It was recorded before their official 1993 debut *Fake Train*, but didn't see release until 1995, well after lead songwriter Trosper had begun to refine his ideas through increasingly strong efforts like 1994's *New Plastic Ideas* and 1995's *The Future Of What*. More importantly, it doesn't feature Lund, whose metronomic rhythm was key to the band's evolution; Brandt Sandeno served as drummer before Lund replaced him on *Fake Train* (he later returned as a contributor to *Leaves Turn Inside You*).

As a result, *Unwound* has long had an odds and sods reputation. In contrast to the clear, wry enunciation Trosper deployed on later gems like "Unauthorized Autobiography", he toggles between mopey talk-singing and declamatory screams, and his tentative approach often holds back the dynamic arrangements of songs like "Antifreeze". Still, his alienation on "Fingertips" is palpable. Trosper, Rumsey and Sandeno craft tangled, mathematical arrangements boiling over with feedback, leading to head-banging churners like "Kid Is Gone".

"I can't give you everything I want/I can't even look at you", Trosper sings on "Stuck In The Middle Of Nowhere Again", reflecting an era defined by bruised honesty and pained hearts.

Mosi Reeves



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