

VACUUM

PACKED

SOUND



Wrapper's delight: a selection of entr'acte releases

It comes to you in a plain plastic wrapper. A CD or LP from the entr'acte label arrives completely encased in tough matt material, with an absolute minimum of printed details to identify the contents. The subtext: this is uncorrupted data, hermetically sealed until you, the intended recipient, snip the package open. Cutting edge sonics protected by cutting edge science: it's a perfect delivery mechanism for electronic music.

"I am an administrator. I take the work in and put it out," smiles Allon Kaye, sitting cross-legged on the floor of a tiny West London apartment. It's virtually bare apart from a computer, a few shelves, and a stereo along one edge of the room. But the whole flat is in essence a workspace dedicated to the label, founded in 1999 with Julian Doyle and Jacques Beloeli, but long since a solo venture. Thousands of CDs sit in neat shrinkwrapped stacks in the kitchen, ready to be laboriously hand-packed into the instantly identifiable vacuum sealed pockets and sent out.

Music comes from recommendations, word of mouth contacts and random submissions, and the idea is to publish, package and post them out as quickly and efficiently as possible. The faster the music circulates, the quicker new connections are forged. "I don't think that my taste should necessarily dictate the fate of the label or indeed people's work," Kaye argues. "It's done very seriously and taken very seriously, but at the same time it's not engineered towards classic status... It's kind of the joy of the moment." So entr'acte's 100-odd releases have ranged from homemade tone generator pieces (Renato Rinaldi), to minutely processed laptop sound works (Esther Venrooy and Helena Gough), to pissed-up toy instrument abuse (Meat Sweats). Serendipitously, it adds up to a formidable body of work, because it's all electronic music thinking outside of the usual circuits.

"By the time we came to do the first vinyl, I knew exactly how I wanted to do it," he recalls. "I wanted it to be completely sealed in a waterproof,

moisture-proof, any kind of proof bag. And totally invisible as a record... I wanted something that was just more anonymous. Oddly enough, starting from the premise that the label should be almost invisible, and considered as a facility. It would just say artist, title, catalogue number in a very pharmaceutical kind of way, which I'd state is an obvious influence." Food packaging is another paradigm. "Japanese food specifically," he clarifies. "Vacuum packed, quite sexy in its own way."

And the material? "It's military grade PVC, in essence. It's the kind of thing they use to wrap up decommissioned planes with."

The sleeves need to be cut open before accessing the music, but are essentially disposable, a simple wrapper with all the necessary info and nothing which might prejudice your opinion of the music. The philosophy is functionality rather than fetishism. Typesetting rather than graphic design is the touchstone: within a precise and fixed framework (and all releases use the same utilitarian monotype font) releases can be prepared simply and more easily. "It's about identification if you like, and repetition," he explains. "Being in London, and working amongst so-called creative people, I got quite fed up with this design culture, and the making of fetish objects out of pretty much everything. No more straightforward books, no more straightforward records, everything is gilded and overprinted and finessed to the nth degree, without any underlying reason for the most part.

"Inviting you to desecrate something you've just spent money on was also interesting," he ponders. "It certainly wasn't deliberate as a premise, the idea wasn't to make something that would have to be interfered with and destroyed, but it was a nice side effect."

Whether for reasons of exacting quality control or wanting to remain independent, each package is still prepared by Allon himself. The material might be space age, but the vacuum sealing is typically done manually, through a combination of weight, dexterity and a lot of time and patience. "Let's put it this way," he discloses, a little uneasily, "it involves a desk, a pile of books and great human effort. It's not unusual to find me standing on the desk on a pile of books reading a book, letting the air out. I've worked it into a process. I'm not sure I can really do more than six or seven at a time without having a massive break in between... It's laborious and it's boring. And it's funny how mood-dependent it is, because on a bad day I'm just incapable of getting a good copy out. There's always something. You'll get a piece of fluff caught in a pristine bit of white.

"I got a bit obsessed, in a very personal way with it, to a point where I was probably unable to share," he reveals. "It is what it is, and it's a chosen path in a sense, that that's how I'm going to do it." As well as investing such time and toil in the label, Kaye, a freelance designer, cheerfully admits he doesn't recoup the money he puts into entr'acte. But working on new projects is simply how he keeps himself in new listening. The packaging is disposable but the music remains ultra-fresh. "There's a deliberate emphasis on keeping it as open as possible to the influx of new, unheard music by people that I don't know, or people that no one knows," he states. "And occasionally in an almost ridiculous way they happen to fit in just right.

"If it's primarily led by chance and opportunity," he notes sagely, tapping a cigarette into the ashtray in the all but empty room, "it's just much more fun." □ entracte.co.uk