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word passages. Meanwhile, an elastic cycle of strings, chants and beats grows increasingly urgent, underscoring his words and providing comfort for the trauma. Like his sculptures made of found objects, the music's layers and genre choices are dynamic, continually reconfiguring to help support the story of "seeds that had to be sorted out and planted deep" – matter of fact narratives taking symbolic turns.

While poetically reminiscent of The Heliocentrics's collaboration with Melvin Van Peebles or Matana Roberts's *Coin Coin* project, the music is stylistically more varied. The flow from Tom Waits-esque freak rock ("What's Going On") to lush, cinematic electronica ("Did I Do Enough?") is assisted by a gallery of illustrious guests – Mary Lattimore's glistening harp licks invite comparisons with Laraaji ("Life") while rapper Billy Woods's tense verses press against industrial beats ("I Looked Over My Shoulder"). The album is most effective in these darker moments, but the healing joy found at its most sentimental is irresistible.

Antonio Poscic

### Imperial Triumphant *Goldstar*

Century Media CD/DL/LP

Since forming in 2005, New York's Imperial Triumphant have been slowly perfecting their grandiose blackened art metal thing. Their early work put them in the dissonant black metal corner with acts like Deathspell Omega and Portal, but bassists and drummers came and went, leaving guitarist and vocalist Zachary Ezrin the only founding member standing.

Since 2015, the line-up has been Ezrin, bassist Steve Blanco and drummer Kenny Grohowski (also a member of John Zorn's ultra-heavy organ trio project Simulacrum and its spinoff band Chaos Magick), and the albums they've made together – 2018's *Vile Luxury*, 2020's *Alphaville*, 2022's *Spirit Of Ecstasy* and now *Goldstar* – have been astonishing feats of almost hubristic compositional and conceptual complexity. Their 2023 covers EP, on which they transformed Wayne Shorter's "Nefertiti" into a dubbed out jazz metal sound



Imperial Triumphant

collage and Metallica's "Motorbreath" into a disorienting Zorn-ian fugue, offers a Rosetta stone for the unprepared listener; hearing what they do to familiar tunes allows one to hear more easily what they're doing in their own work.

As they've been doing since *Vile Luxury* if not earlier, Imperial Triumphant continue to explore the concept of New York City as hell, presided over by plutocrats indistinguishable from demons. Greed and hedonism are scorned in their vituperative lyrics, as decadence and nihilism are soundtracked by their constantly shifting, ear-twisting riffs, deep bass and blasting drums (which periodically shift into jazz or Latin rhythms, the better to conjure impressions of the city at night). Blanco's fretless bass interlude on "Pleasuredome" is simultaneously a surprise and the exact right move; meanwhile, guest vocalist Yoshiko Ohara's shrieks and incantatory wails on the 47 second grindcore opus "NEWYORKCITY" feel like being confronted by a lunatic on the subway.

This is a nerve-sanding, whiplash-inducing album with flashes of prog rock beauty, and it reveals greater depths every time you play it.

Phil Freeman

### Eiko Ishibashi

#### *Antigone*

Drag City DL/LP

#### *Kafka's Ibiki*

#### *Shiminkai*

Newhere DL/LP

Take a quick listen to the opening songs of Eiko Ishibashi's first solo studio album since 2018's *The Dream My Bones Dream*, and it sounds vanilla. "Coma" drifts by with the warm acoustic shuffle and plaintive vocals of Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams", "October" has fretless bass flourishes reminiscent of Sting. Move closer, though, and every piece of sound is in flux. On "Coma", a melodica sucks in and out as if it is starting to curl backwards, and Tatsuhisa Yamamoto's drumming circles nervously around a high end of snares and toms with not much foot action to ground it. "October" is underlaid with some kind of radio transmission like Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* – another album created in the orbit of Jim O'Rourke.

The music has the translucent character of Ishibashi's soundtracks for Ryusuke Hamaguchi's films, where its resonance and weight change depending on the attention you pay to them. Ishibashi's vocals are airy, light, almost noncommittal, but this only adds another layer of enigma and malleability. The penultimate track is the eight minute "The Model", which begins placidly but drifts into a humid cloud of synths and a lulling robotic monologue in the middle. Like Kate Bush's music, it's glossy art rock that's in a profound state of metamorphosis. *Antigone* is everything that your overpriced city pop vinyl reissue promised but failed to deliver.

Kafka's Ibiki are a trio of Ishibashi, Yamamoto and O'Rourke, with Ishibashi playing flute over the rhythm section, and all three adding electronics. *Shiminkai* contains one extended live performance, recorded by Joe Talia and reworked in the studio by O'Rourke, which begins with droning

keyboard lines and gathers momentum with a measured drum barrage like a krautrock band in their 1980s incarnation. Like some of Oren Ambarchi's longform albums, every sound is marshalled into a crafted, cinematic episode, but Ishibashi's flute always makes sure the music stays curious and opened.

Derek Walmsley

### Brandon Lopez

#### *Nada Sagrada*

Relative Pitch CD/DL

### Brandon Lopez & DoYeon Kim

#### *Szygy Vol 1*

577 CD-R/DL

### Fred Moten & Brandon López

#### *Revision*

Tao Forms CD/DL/LP

*Nada Sagrada* translates from Spanish to English as *Nothing Sacred*, but if bassist and bandleader Brandon Lopez needed to subtitle the record, *And Nothing's Off Limits* would work just fine. Recorded at the 2023 Vision Festival, it's a fearless first time encounter between six musicians who had all played with Lopez before, but never in this configuration. Collectively they pitch themselves into a middle ground between chamber improv and chaotic street grooves, which the players know well enough to handle neither one gently.

Mat Maneri's viola, DoYeon Kim's gayageum (Korean zither) and Zeena Parkins's electric harp turn sharp quarters, warp lines into long arcs, and fling jagged sonorities in the general direction of Lopez and drummers Gerald Cleaver and Tom Rainey's mercurial shifts between time and space. Wherever the scrum is least stable, Cecilia Lopez tosses static bursts and wispy electronic whistles into the mix. This one is for those who relish the mess.

The vividly recorded *Szygy Vol 1* is necessarily less chaotic, since there are only two musicians involved, but it's even more intense. Kim and Lopez are well matched, both temperamentally and instrumentally, since both players relish a head-on battle, and the double bass and the gayageum work with a similar range of possibilities from sustained to atomised sound, but in substantially different pitch spectrums. Besides their shared badassness, Kim and Lopez are both great at managing bowed sound masses. They are also, behind their aggression, compositional improvisors. Whether waxing tectonic on "IV" or fashioning a persuasively Korean-sounding blues on "III", they develop their ideas patiently and finish them before they wear out.

Lopez has recorded previously and toured diligently with poet and critical theorist Fred Moten in a trio with Gerald Cleaver, but *Revision* is their first duo recording. Aside from a few occasions when he breaks into a raggedly affectionate croon, Moten's delivery is measured and calm, as though he trusts his dense, allusive language to do the heavy lifting. His faith is well placed. Lopez's playing is correspondingly less aggressive than on the other records under consideration. But whether he accompanies Moten with widely spaced, tolling harmonics, seething long tones, or a briskly zig-zagging plucked line, he