

Written by Duncan Edwards

Sunday, 23 May 2021 18:57 - Last Updated Wednesday, 26 May 2021 05:01



The Nurse With Wound List is a unique passport to musical discoveries located beyond the horizon of well-trodden flat Earth popular culture. NWW's founder member and sole curator, Steven Stapleton, has teamed with the Finders Keepers label to issue one track by every artist mentioned in the directory of obscurity. The second edition (Germany) is highly anticipated, but this first volume announces a high standard with gems including those from Horrific Child, Jean Guérin, Lard Free, Pierre Henry, and ZNR. Compilation albums can tend to be patchy, but this one is a consistent gift, probably because it originates from a lengthy real world exploration, the kind of which will never be replicated by any amount of fast clicking through the digital haystack. The *Strain Crack & Break* series is going to confound the expectations of seasoned crate diggers and newcomers alike.

[Finders Keepers](#)

Nurse With Wound's 1979 debut *Chance Meeting on a Dissecting Table of a Sewing Machine and an Umbrella* was recorded in six hours and the general reaction can best be described as underwhelmed bemusement. UK music weekly *Sounds* awarded it ????? instead of using their normal 1-5 stars rating system. The title comes from the surrealist book *Les Chants de Maldoror*, and NWW dedicated the album to the Nihilist Spasm Band and also Luigi Russolo (author of *The Art Of Noises*). However, the infamous reputation of *Chance Meeting* is chiefly due to it containing a list of NWW's favorite uber-obscure artistic influences and inspirations. This idea was taken from an album by German free jazz artist Wolfgang Dauner. Stapleton and co-author John Fothergil argued for months, culling choices from around eight years of rabid record collecting. In Stapleton's case, this began in 1971 aged 14, when he bought his first Amon Düül album. The pair scoured Soho, and traveled through the UK and Europe scouring second hand shops for anything deemed original or boundary shattering. By 17, Stapleton was living at sound engineer Conny Plank's house and working as roadie for the band Guru Guru.

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France

is thus a tiny sample of a vast, doggedly idiosyncratic, collection.

The opening two pieces plunge into atmospheres markedly removed from hearing human beings play music. Imagine falling into a dream where a surreal movie flickers in a darkened theater, or more accurately into a daytime wide awake trance. Throughout, most of the pieces are fascinating rather than uncomfortable. For example the utterly charming "Solo un Dia" by ZNR (a so-called "chamber rock" duo fond of short songs inspired by Erik Satie). Incidentally, ZNR's *Barricade 3* album featured artwork by Don van Vliet. Another similar treasure, Pierre Henry's brilliantly doleful "Generique (Theme de Myriam)" sounds like the square root of Sun City Girls' *Funeral Mariachi* album. A lengthier and more dynamic piece, Horrific Child's "Freyeur" is a cut-up smorgasbord of psychotic tribal prog-funk that gives way to urban film theme, hypnotic Burundi breath-chant, grunting rock riffing, township stomp-clap vibe, and throaty Arabic whispering-in-a-sandstorm invocations blowing up a parched desert-blues twang. By contrast, Lard Free appear to be strolling down the same boulevard as *Melody Nelson* with cool bass and siren-like blasts of sax, only to be interrupted by slabs of crunching guitar. It is rather like when you're listening to a cool track online which improves when your computer suddenly kicks in with an unrelated song from your music library.

These selections are "old friends" for Stapleton, and if we newcomers should not expect to love them as much as he does, the majority sound amazingly fresh after almost half a century. My least favorite track, a nonsensical glue-and-string circus of maddening vocal announcements and squawking plastic horns splattered with faux applause, at least has undeniable high energy and plenty of legitimate swagger. I resisted any temptation to skip tracks and felt the coherence of the album and that the running order flows so well that this could almost be an album by one artist. Apparently Dashiell Hedayat is backed by some members of Gong for "Fille De L'Ombre" - a suitably weird penultimate piece with an underground vibe, by which I mean it feels as if we are in catacombs beneath a city, or wading through a sewer. Jean Guérin's "Triptik 2" from his fantastic album *Tacet*, is a fitting end to this short visit to the France of someone else's dreams. In this dreamlike place I can but flail around for descriptors: free jazz experimentation, genre-eclipsing exoticism, bleeping electronic strangeness, indescribable, bizarre, melodic, space nightmare, earthy day dream.

The NWW list has undeniably aged well. After being totally ignored it has gradually become a cult reference point. While the list does not specify the work of the artist included, prices for some of their rare vinyl have risen astronomically. Stapleton has sold all but 1000 of the original rarities he collected, and he's built a house in Ireland (near the *Father Ted* house) with the proceeds. That would be an ecumenical matter. Coincidentally, I bought my first record in 1971 and remember the hunger to find new sounds and a need to distance myself from dull

Brainwashed - "Strain Crack & Break: Music From The Nurse With Wound List Volume One (France)"

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ubiquitous options. At one point, to throw off an annoying hanger-on, a group of school friends and I invented a group called Horizon. We would rave knowingly about non-existent Peel sessions, bootleg cassettes, or late night television appearances. I am unrepentant about that. I doubt the target of our minor teenage cruelty was, or still is, a music obsessive; more likely he now plays golf, works in law, and earns 10 times the national average. Part of me expected to find Horizon on the NWW list.

[Samples available here.](#)