

### **Gravity Spells: Bay Area New Music And Expanded Cinema Art**

#### **Various**

2xLP+4xDVD+Pbk

Californian artist John Davis compiled this ambitious set released to accompany a performance series held in Berkeley in 2014, and the non-narrative films on its four DVDs hark back to the visionary heyday of underground cinema. Paul Clipson contributes a beautiful structural composition – a lattice of fences, walls, bars and blinds, superimposed and set in contrary motion. Kerry Laitala's *Solar Furnace* is a performance of prismatic gleams and flickering light-play. Larry Jordan and Craig Baldwin both juggle vintage footage, externalised memories and fragmented fantasies, encrypted with desire and anxiety.

The package also includes two LPs with textless labels, and a 50 page booklet containing essays and monochrome images. Davis provisionally paired contributing musicians with film makers, while intending that the LP and DVD material should remain interchangeable and open to permutation. His own musical offering is a seductive slice of morphing minimalism; Tashi Wada harnesses two violins in rising and falling drones; Maggi Payne creates roaring and flaringly elemental electronic soundscapes; Ben Bracken and Ashley Bellouin combine bowed metal resonance with sepulchral organ tones.

Media theorist Gene Youngblood, who promoted the notion of expanded cinema, prophesied in 1970 that the art and technology of this emerging form would “create heaven right here on earth”. Sidestepping that utopian flourish, the broad thesis of Youngblood's book was that expanded cinema was not about movies, but the development of audiovisual extensions that might manifest consciousness outside of the human mind. In that sense, experimental film arguably did blaze a trail into our online present, where many of its techniques and devices, maybe even its sensibility, have been assimilated and redeployed, albeit in diluted and sometimes banal forms. *Gravity Spells*, a celebration of current collaborative possibilities, is also an invigorating return to the source, a fascinating dip into the still bubbling wellsprings of live cinema and its music.

**Julian Cowley**

#### **Soundcheck A–Z**

Sir Richard Bishop  
Blind Idiot God  
John Carpenter  
Carter Tutti  
Eric Chenaux  
D'Angelo And The Vanguard  
Dan Deacon  
FE Denning Descension Orchestra  
Michael Francis Duch  
Runhild Gammelsæter & Lasse Marhaug  
The Inward Circles  
Kåre Kolberg  
Jason Kahn & Phil Julian  
Jöelle Léandre & Michael Duch  
DJ Marcelle  
Micachu  
Microtub  
Joacim Nyberg  
Panda Bear  
Pevelerist  
The Pitch  
The Pop Group  
Powell  
Matana Roberts  
Patrick Shiroishi  
Six Organs Of Admittance  
Helge Sten  
TCF  
TSU!

*Various Devotional Music For Invisible Cities*

*Various Gravity Spells: Bay Area New Music And Expanded Cinema Art*

*Various Kazbek: Field Recordings From The Caucasus 2012–2014*

*Various Multiple Tap*

*Vi*

*Christian Wallumrød*

*Pete Wiggs*

*Zs*

*Robbie Basho*

*Brian Eno*

*Sten Hanson*

*King Crimson*

*Ákos Rózmán*

*Various Jazz In Polish Cinema: Out Of The Underground 1958–1967*

*Various Punk 45: Extermination Nights In The Sixth City – Cleveland, Ohio:*

*Punk And The Decline Of The Mid-West 1975–80*

*Various Punk 45: Burn Rubber City Burn! – Akron, Ohio: Punk And The Decline Of The Mid-West 1975–80*



V/A Gravity Spells (Bimodal Press) 2lp + 4dvd-r + book

Earlier in 2014, the multimedia artist John Davis presented an amazing series of expanded cinema at the Kala Art Institute in Berkeley, showcasing Bay Area artists whose work operate in the liminal regions between avant-garde composition and experimental filmmaking. The most visible and vocal proponent of such work is San Francisco's Paul Clipson, whose 8mm and 16mm films of in-camera edits & overlaid imagery have long been the visual accompaniments to the likes of Barn Owl, Grouper, Tarentel, Joshua Churchill, and Brendan Murray (just to name a few). Clipson's work was just one of many artists presented during the month-long festival that Davis curated, with this weighty object - two slabs of vinyl, a hefty book, and four dvd-rs each dedicated to one of four filmmakers - documenting a handful of the pieces that were exhibited / projected / performed during the festival.

So, there are filmmakers Lawrence Jordan, Craig Baldwin, and Kerry Laitala joining Clipson on the video programs; and Tashi Wada, Maggi Payne, and Ashley Bellouin & Ben Bracken joining John Davis as the composers. There were far more notable artists whose work did not get covered in this compendium (e.g. Keith Evans, Beige, Mary Helena Clarke, Steve Dye, Andy Puls, and aQ's own Jim Haynes), meaning that there's more than enough material to warrant a second volume.

The two slabs of vinyl contain long-form tracks from each of the aforementioned composers, whose work corresponds to the soundtrack of the video programs, but these sounds are also designed to be listened to independent of the image, harboring an indeterminacy to the marriage of sound and image as well as its severance. Bellouin & Bracken are stalwart performers here in the Bay Area, who sadly have not released any of their work up until now. Overtones and harmonics from bowed metal rods, handcrafted glass harmonica, and subtly reinforced electronics offer an amazingly rich composition of melodic sound pools progressing at the pace of a late period Morton Feldman composition. Davis has released his own work through Root Strata and Students Of Decay over the years, with world-weary delicacies of sonic filigree suspended upon field recordings and cracked electronics. Here, he takes on the contemplative sequences of analog synth / library musics with fragments alluding to Susanne Ciani that darken over time through scratchy loops and radiant black drones. The iconic Bay Area minimalist Maggi Payne slips through her quiet hush by way of downpitched white noise into thrumming masses, Shepard tone glissandos, and ice-sharp textures. Tashi Wada's downtuning compositions for two violins resonating acoustically in near lockstep with each other is a perfect recapitulation of Tony Conrad's ideas behind Slapping Pythagoras. Brilliantly done by all of the composers!

We'll leave the video components alone for the time being; as Gravity Spells is strictly limited to 100 copies, many of which were sold at the festival itself. There's only a handful of these left. A true labor of love from John Davis, and it shows!

Aquarius Records, San Francisco

