

The release of Luke Abbott's *Wysing Forest* second album in 2014 was a coming of age moment for the Norfolk-based electronic producer, composer and live performer, kicking off a prolific new phase in his musical career. An early series of idiosyncratic 12"s for the outsider electronics labels Output and Border Community had earned him a loyal following on the world's more off-kilter dancefloors before the joyous arpeggios and rolling primal rhythms of his "game-changing electronic opus" (Drowned in Sound) debut *Holkham Drones* thrust him into the critics' 2010 best-of lists, deftly positioning himself somewhere between the twin poles of Krautrock and techno. But the *Wysing Forest* follow-up – a gentle, nuanced and often ambient recording of the intimate improvised live performances made during his time as musician-in-residence at the Wysing Arts Centre in the Cambridgeshire countryside – marked a return to Abbott's more leftfield roots, first forged during his art school and university studies towards a degree in Electroacoustic Composition at the UEA in his hometown of Norwich.

This early immersion in electronic music's more experimental impulses has of course informed all of Abbott's musical output to date, from building his own circuit-bent hardware, midi-controller creations and custom software to the schizophrenic range of electronic sub-species (from 8-bit glitch through to field recording) which adorned his early 12"s. The inherent wonk of his boutique analogue synths and his bolshy, offbeat and polyrhythmic approach to percussion imbued even his earliest creations with an overwhelmingly warm, human and positively homemade character. Far more than just the musical accessory of the moment, for Luke the infinite combinatorial possibilities of the modular synthesizer has long served as the perfect conduit for his improvisational impulses, its tactile knobs providing the hands-on tools to experiment.

But with the rapturous soundscapes of *Wysing Forest* Abbott has made his most structured commitment yet to the principles of electroacoustic exploration, celebrating the sheer joy and versatility of his modular synthesizer with an intuitive arrangement that leads from abstract explorations of texture and tone (such as the wonky synaptic indulgence of opener 'Two Degrees') via the majestic restraint of the austere, elegaic pastorals of the sublime 'Amphis' to the Abbott-signature lumpen danceability of subtle album peak moments 'Free Migration' and 'Highrise' – and back again. The finished article's 52 minute duration may have been chopped into 9 track-sized chunks for the sake of convention, but this is most definitely an album which is greater than the sum of its parts, designed to be listened to in one immersive, indulgent go.

And it turns out that this realignment and reintegration of his youthful art school indoctrination with the challenges of being an independent electronic musician in the twenty-first century has actually been a somewhat liberating experience for Abbott, kickstarting a new wave of experimentation – together with a flurry of accompanying releases. The source of inspiration for his first post-Wysing project came a little closer to home, in the form of his first film soundtrack commission from writer-director Guy Myhill to score his debut feature film *The Goob*, set in Abbott's home county of Norfolk. His evocative, atmospheric synthscapes went on to win Abbott the award for 'Best Music' at the Stockholm Film Festival, before being packaged together under the title *Music For A Flat Landscape* to form the first (sold out) release on Abbott's own new record label Buffalo Temple. A second Buffalo Temple release soon followed, pairing Abbott with Portico Quartet saxophonist Jack Wyllie for an eponymously-titled EP of perfectly-judged expressive synth-and-sax ambient improvisations, with a third album of Abbott-initiated collaborations featuring Abbott, Wyllie and PVT drummer Laurence Pike collectively exploring a more propulsive path under the band banner of Szun Waves set to be unveiled in the new year.

Abbott's longstanding relationship with the Border Community label also continues on an improvised, ambient and New Age tip, in the form of a split double LP which backs James Holden

& Camilo Tirado's extended alliance of synth and tabla *Outdoor Museum of Fractals* with Abbott's solo synth meditation *555Hz*. Both pieces were originally commissioned to mark the occasion of American minimalist Terry Riley's 80th birthday as part of a series of performances at London's Barbican and Amsterdam's Muziekgebouw venues, and Abbott's 30 minute long gong-drone offering sees him rise to the challenge of writing the same sort of hypnotic, slowly-unfolding linear music as championed by Riley, gently exploring the textural configurations of the self-anointed mystical frequency of 555Hz via modular synth and resonating gong in a series of in-the-moment improvised wave-like swells.

Alongside this jam-packed release schedule, Luke and his handcrafted hardware-jams continue to rumble through the gig venues and festivals of Europe, eager to strut his improvisational stuff in whatever live or collaborative context might come his way, with or without current co-conspirators Jack Wyllie (saxophone) and Laurence Pike (drums). Indeed, such is the improvisational adaptability of his condensed portable modular synth set-up that the unique hedonistic freedom of his old stomping ground the club dancefloor continues to provide an unusual – but inherently open-minded – sandbox testing ground for his improvisational impulses. For Abbott is that surprisingly rare breed amongst modern day electronic musicians for whom genuine, heartfelt live performance – as opposed to the painstakingly arranged computer bound product, and accompanying concert playback – lies at the heart of what he does. Indeed, it is in this type of in-the-moment responsive live performance that Luke's raw talent is at its most obvious – as evidenced by the most recent additions to his bulging back catalogue.

Meanwhile, back in Norwich the modular synthesizer arms race continues apace as Luke furthers his electroacoustic explorations, turning in the odd idiosyncratic remix along the way: Domino's James Yorkston is the most recent addition to an impressive list of remix credits that includes Nils Frahm, Jon Hopkins, Dan Deacon, John Talabot, Portico Quartet, PVT and East India Youth. Building on his recent Buffalo Temple recording experiences, he has also recently developed a new sideline in mixing and producing for other artists, beginning with his old mucker Gold Panda (whose own Notown imprint previously hosted Abbott's utopian synth anthem 'Modern Driveway'). And with his own new label waiting in the wings to provide a home for the results of his assorted audio experiments, Luke's recent endeavours have earned him a new level of complete artistic freedom that will long sustain him as he strides out into the great next album unknown.

Gemma Sheppard

selected press

"In short, this is utterly gorgeous, and both the best ambient and best soundtrack album to come out in 2015." - 8/10, **Drowned In Sound** on *Music For a Flat Landscape*

"The prize for music in film goes to a film that used music coming from the culture in which it was set. It managed to use diverse music in a way that respects us as viewers – giving us space to think our own thoughts and feel our own feelings." - 'Best Music' Award, **25th Stockholm International Film Festival** for *The Goob*

"..it is a sprawling affirmation of life." - 9/10, **DJ Magazine** on *Wysing Forest*

"Electronic music that is at turns subtle and soothing, intense and challenging. You can trace its lineage back through Boards of Canada to Aphex Twin and beyond to Eno. A richly rewarding experience." - 4/5, **Mojo** on *Holkham Drones*

"It's always more fulfilling when something enters your radar through word of mouth. DIY by nature, working from Norfolk, Abbott is a wizard with noise. If Britain had a Pitchfork then surely he would be its darling" - Hayden Thorpe of Wild Beasts (talking to **The Guardian**)

