

## Music

### Life in a Post-Tonic Universe

Downtown innovators like White Out fight for survival in a brave, disquieting new world



Jens Jurgensen

BY BRAD COHAN

**T**om Sargal, drummer for the improvising avant-gardists White Out—a duo completed by his significant other, multi-instrumentalist Lin Culbertson—insists that although myriad clubs they've played are now history (including the Cooler, CBGB, and, most recently, Tonic), it's not their fault. "I wouldn't label Lin and me the kiss of death of the New York club scene," Sargal asserts. "There are a slew of venues that cease to exist which I can assure you we never played in."

The two met in 1986, introduced by actor (and original Sonic Youth drummer) Richard Edson outside CBGB during a Big Black show. Fittingly, White Out now stand as Big Black's antithesis, a free-jazz deconstruction devoid of niche, with a seismic ambience and atonal serenity that's made the group a vital, if overlooked, part of the downtown scene. Sargal insists that he's guilty of "never playing a beat in my entire life," but WO's records—*Red Shift* (1995), *Drunken Little Mass* (2001), and *China Is Near* (2005)—dampen his claim. His throngs of beats (or lack thereof) freely shift from tribal textures to cymbal-tapped propulsions, intersecting with the angelic streaks that Culbertson provides via analog synthesizer, flute, autoharp, and interstellar voice manipulations.

Like Thurston Moore, Sargal traversed the downtown infrastructure for years: He booked gigs for Pussy Galore in the '80s

and set up shows during the Gulf War under the label "Support Jazz, Not War." He also watched the fledgling art-music scene evolve from a minuscule enclave shunned by clubs to a fledgling powerhouse embraced by the avant homestead that was the old Knitting Factory on Houston. Not that Sargal was a fan: "I never liked it there, or any incarnation. Years ago, when they were coming into their own, they were practicing a kind of 'cultural apartheid.' I started a series doing off-hours at rock clubs, putting on local jazz guys because they were being aced out—people like Charles Gayle and Rashied Ali." Sargal found CB's no better. "I used to play with Rudolph Grey and the Blue Humans, and Thurston would often sit in. The sound guy was so clueless he wouldn't recognize him—and he's goddamn recognizable at like seven feet tall. They'd turn the PA off halfway through our set. That was New York at that point, so we've come a long way, baby."

He's alluding to the ascension of downtown experimentalism, fomented by meatpacking-district hub the Cooler and its progeny, Tonic. "That's an undocumented aspect to New York nightlife, because the Cooler had an eclectic program," Sargal says. "You can go see Gayle, us, Tortoise, electronica—it all worked together. Nothing seemed incongruous. Nothing has taken its place. Tonic was its cultural heir."

Ah, Tonic. Closed a year ago this month, and lamented thousands of times since. Forced out by those fucking luxury condos sprouting like the plague from

**White Out pose in front of another once-vital experimental music spot.**

Bowery to Norfolk Street and beyond, displacing any semblance of artistic confluence in its path. White Out, like many experimentalists, called it home, called its owners and employees family. "It was a real community," Sargal says. "We were like the house band and felt like we were one with the club." His better half echoes the sentiment: "Tonic was a hangout," Culbertson recalls. "You could meet friends there for an evening and hang at the bar. The sad thing is, we've lost contact with a lot of people as a result of it closing."

Helen Rush, of avant-folksters Metal Mountains, worked the door for seven of Tonic's nine years, and testifies to that familial environment. "There is no venue left with the intimacy it had and the range of artists that played there—new, upcoming outsiders to old-school avant," she says. "Collaborations were born out of folks meeting there." Co-worker and ubiquitous drummer Anton Fier lends a pessimistic outlook, speculating as to who's picking up its clientele. "I thought Knitting Factory would have taken over," he says. "Marc Ribot's Ceramic Dog just played there, but it took a year for that natural transition to happen. Manhattan is a more difficult place to play than ever."

"I still get e-mails from local and touring musicians who aren't sure where to play," former Tonic co-owner Melissa Caruso Scott writes via e-mail. "The Stone

[in the East Village], Barbès [Park Slope], and Jalopy [Brooklyn's Columbia Street] are great, but I'm not sure where 'Tonic musicians' play." She echoes the powerful hankering for a clique, a home base. "Most people I speak to miss having a space where creative musicians came almost any night and saw someone they knew in the audience, and discovered something new and exciting onstage. Although there are new venues, I don't think any of them have fulfilled this need."

Williamsburg's Zebulon, Park Slope's Tea Lounge, and a few other experimental W-burg spots—Glasslands and Death by Audio—have also helped fill the void. The migration, though, has slanted primarily toward the Stone, John Zorn's anomalous performance space. "It's a great facility, but it's not a 'club,'" Sargal says. "They don't encourage people to hang out, and it caters to a rarefied stratum of music. It's curated, so the chances of playing there with any frequency are marginal. Even Zorn can't play there—and he owns the place—depending on who's curating that month. It exists out of the kindness of his heart, and it's hemorrhaging money."

Indeed, last Saturday night, the Stone charged an econo *five dollars* to see White Out transcendently run the gamut from sonic overload to pristine calm. Augmented by Samara Lubelski's delicate violin touch-and-pluck as well as Sargal's dry banter ("We encourage bodily functions," he announced, motioning toward the makeshift bathroom looming near his drum kit), the set was an exercise in rapport, personal and musical, Culbertson's sinuous nuances brushing up against the clanks, dings, shakes, and scrapes emanating from her partner's cache of percussive contraptions.

Not content with the occasional Stone gig, Sargal's back to booking shows, too. His monthly events at Rehab (formerly Club Midway) on the LES, subtitled "Red Desert Nights," have an explicit Tonic connection—a former employee there works the door. "I wouldn't be curating these shows if Tonic was still in existence, but I don't wax nostalgic—I'm not into that," he admits, having waxed only slightly nostalgic. "At the end of the day, you pave on and find a new situation. It's why I'm doing this—out of necessity." With Culbertson chipping in—she designs the posters—White Out has found a new space

**'Manhattan is a more difficult place to play than ever.'**

to improv. Last month's noise-dominated night (derailed, alas, after Midwestern rascals Hair Police totaled their van) supports Sargal's vision of an aesthetic mélange. "I don't want to slap myself on the back, but I've put on variety," he says. "I've had P.G. Six, Sunburned [Hand of the Man], Zorn, and Han Bennink. It's social, and I'm friends with these people. But as time ensues, I'll start booking my enemies."

Next for White Out is May's No Fun Fest, the annual noise free-for-all, held this time at the Knitting Factory. The duo is also set to return to Moore's powerhouse Ecstatic Peace! label: "Thurston's gone corporate, and he can afford our big asking price," Sargal jokes. Their forthcoming effort will be a double album—joined by frequent co-conspirators Jim O'Rourke and Moore himself—recorded live at (where else?) Tonic. "That's our final homage," Sargal says, "and a fitting punctuation mark to that whole era."

## White Out

by [Bart de Paepe](#)



One of the most exciting improv outfits around these days has to be White Out, the New York duo of drummer Tom Sural and synth wizard Lin Culbertson. One aspect that characterises the band is their openness for collaborations with other people: Jim O'Rourke, William Winant, Thurston Moore and David Nuss among others all played with the duo on albums like 'Red Shift', 'Drunken Little Mass' and the recently released 'China Is Near'. Though the sound of White Out may differ according to who's playing, the overall sound can only be described as 'White Out'. We had a chat with Tom and Lin, who once met each other during a Big Black show at CBGB's.



### Why did you choose the name White Out? Is there a specific meaning behind that?

Tom Sural: We chose the name White Out because it seemed to be the name that best evoked the kind of music we play. In terms of what it means, I'm not really sure how to answer that. What does any name mean? What does 'Tom Sural' mean? Like the end result of any form of artistic expression, it should mean something different to anybody who encounters it. We do however enjoy

everything that the name suggests: A blizzard condition, a form of cinematic montage (the opposite of black out). It's also an American brand name for corrective ink (which most people erroneously think was invented by Mike Nesmith's mother, when in reality she conceived the rival brand Liquid Paper.

### Was there a particular record that got you into improvised music? What does improvising mean to you and what makes playing in White Out special/different from playing with other people?

Lin Culbertson: I actually listened to a lot of Sun Ra in my formative years. I really like the crazy freewheeling spirit of "anything goes" that some of his albums elicit. Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch* was also a very influential record for me. We are practitioners of "free improvisation" which has absolutely no pre-determined elements. There is no pretense and no calculation, just action and expression. It could be seen as a life philosophy I guess. The most fun is playing with people who you have an affinity with. Like any collective activity, improvisation can be unsuccessful if the participants do not respond well or listen to each other. Playing in White Out is an ecstatic experience! Everyone we have collaborated with has brought a special uniqueness to the project. Tom and I have very similar tastes in music and I love playing with an excellent drummer who is conceptual and always trying new ideas.

TS: There is no one record that got me into improvisation. Actually I don't really like to ponder my role as an improviser. I prefer to blur the line between what is composed and what is improvised. All art is improvised to some extent, the classical musician interpreting a predetermined score must still lend his own individual voice to the part he is to play, otherwise everything would just be computerized. It's all a matter of degree. When we sit down to perform, we have the same set of concerns that any other musician playing music has. We play parts, they just haven't been written yet. Playing in White Out is indeed a very special setting for me. Lin is the 'ultimate collaborator a truly original force, supremely inventive, and a deep listener. Nels Cline has dubbed her "New York's best kept secret", and what can I say about Jim that hasn't already been said many times over. Those cats rule my world. Playing with people of such high musical caliber and then combining those estimable talents with those of our other friends like Thurston, Watt, and Winant is like a dream come true.

### Do you see a political dimension in playing all this improv stuff? What about improvising outside the music?

TS: Everything we do is political. Every action one takes has political ramifications. Look White Out doesn't pander to an audience, we subscribe to the old Miles Davis principal: that we only play for ourselves and the other musicians we perform with. We are part of a resistance movement, a resistance to mediocrity, the most politically righteous path an artist can take.

LC: I do see performing this type of free improvisational music as political. It is such marginal music and very challenging for the audience. Listening requires a degree of both concentration and surrender. I am amazed by the growing number of people who are interested in

experiencing it. Improvisation can be exhilarating for the audience as well as the musicians. Many times there is someone who comes up after a show with a look of astonishment on their faces. It is usually the first time they have heard this type of music and have totally connected with it. It's great to indoctrinate people into the world of "free".

**Tom, in earlier interviews you stated that you feel more connected with European improvisers like Brötzmann and Parker: what is it in their approach you feel connected to? In which sense is their playing different from Americans? Have you ever played with Europeans?**

TS: That response you are referring to was taken out of context, I was being asked to comment on a very specific stratum of American players. Obviously there are a lot of American musicians I hold in high regard, many of whom I have already mentioned in the course of this interview. But I will reiterate as to why I feel a special affinity for European improvisers: Basically what it comes down to is that the Euros are not so encumbered by formulaic structures. They don't feel so compelled to play blues changes and adhere to set time signatures. Their playing is as informed by new music, and pure sound as it is by any other influences, which is precisely where we are coming from. Yes I have played with both Peter Brötzmann and Evan Parker, two of the most rewarding musical unions I have ever experienced.

**Does White Out play a lot of shows? Any favourite recent one?**

LC: We don't play a lot of shows. This type of music has a specialized audience. We haven't been to Europe yet so would love to go over and play there. My favorite show is last December at the club Tonic in NYC with Jim and Thurston.



**Lin, apart from White Out you're also playing solo as Quasi Sutro. Is that all solo synth?**

LC: Quasi Sutro is a recording project that had a cassette release on the Freedom-From label quite a while back. It is multi-tracked stuff that is both more structured and more subdued than White Out jams. I also use additional instruments to the synth: piano, guitar, flute, voice...

There is more Quasi to come.

**What synths do you use? Do you make some of these yourself?**

LC: I use all vintage gear. Up until about a year ago I played a Sequential Circuits Pro-One and a Casio CZ 101. Now I just have a Korg MS-20 and an autoharp in my setup. Since attempting to make my first drum machine from a PAiA kit, I have abandoned the idea of constructing my own instruments. I do not solder well.

**Tom, you've played a lot with Blue Humans, how did you get involved with that band? Does it still exist?**

TS: My involvement with the Blue Humans stemmed from Thurston producing a new Rudolph Grey record and him asking me to come into the studio and help EQ the drums for Rashied Ali. It was my first introduction to Rudolph and we discovered that we had a lot in common and we developed an immediate rapport. Our musical union evolved from there. Rudolph's a real original. Actually the first time we ever played together came out of that session and was documented on the New York Eye and Ear compilation put out by Matador. No the Blue Humans do not currently exist. Rudolph has been relatively inactive in recent years, let's hope that changes soon.

**Actually you've played on a few records with Thurston Moore like 'Not Me' and 'Klangfarbenmelodie...and the Colorist strikes Primitiv': how did you meet him?**

TS: I met Thurston through my friend Lydia Lunch some 20 + years ago. Just for the record Thurston is one of my all time favourite people and we were already the best of friends before we ever played a note of music together.

**How did you get in touch with Lydia Lunch? I believe you're also playing on one of her records...**

TS: Well I wouldn't say we worked together, I just sat in on some odd metal bits for a record she was cutting when we were both out in LA a very long time ago. Lydia is a lifelong friend of mine whom I met when I was doing set design for a feature film she was playing the lead in.

--[Bart de Paepe](#) (2 July, 2006)





White Out w/Jim O'Rourke and William Winant  
China Is Near  
[ATP; 2005]  
Rating: 7.5

Since their late-1990s inception, White Out-- as comprised by multi-instrumentalist Lin Culbertson and drummer Tom Surgal-- have been one of the most consistently absorbing and unpredictable experimental outfits on the grid. The duo's fertile sound is unusually malleable, due in part to a top-notch succession of collaborators ranging from the No Neck Blues Band's David Nuss to Nels Cline to Thurston Moore. For their third album, *China Is Near*, White Out have enlisted perhaps their most sympathetic ringers yet-- percussionist William Winant and avant-chameleon Jim O'Rourke. And with the aid of these familiar, well-traveled guests-- each of whom has appeared on more records than most of us could consume in a decade-- White Out are here again able to boldly pilot their freeform clamor toward distant alien horizons.

*China Is Near* marks White Out's second studio go-around with their frequent live partner O'Rourke, following their Ecstatic Peace alliance on 2000's *Drunken Little Mass*. Thanks in large measure to Culbertson's extensive use of burbling analog synths, that album showcased the collective at their most overtly jazzy, their cosmic agitations frequently recalling early-70s era Herbie Hancock or Sun Ra at his Moogiest. And while *China Is Near* retains a few hazy echoes of that predecessor, here the group has further atomized their nebulous sound, continually spiraling the music's various fragments further and further outward from previously mapped territories and definable genres.

With the presence of Winant, the album unsurprisingly finds White Out's work increasingly dominated by its astonishing vari-

ety of percussive textures. Neither Winant nor Surgal is the type of percussionist who settles easily for the mundane duties of time-keeping. Here instead the two augment their wide assortment of drums with an eclectic array of chains, scrap metal and gongs as they stretch their loose, intuitive playing to inhabit whatever open space Culbertson and O'Rourke can spare. This approach results in intensely evocative tracks like "Empty Centre", a gauzy drone that Winant and Surgal encompass with jingle bells and the rattle of knives to ward off all evil spirits and/or grizzly bears. Similarly, on "Mutinous" a mounting force of tympanis pound like the sinister footsteps of an encroaching invasion force as swarms of growling electronics slowly build to do feverish battle, the listener forcibly encouraged to quickly choose sides.

Since they use such an unorthodox array of electronic and treated instrumentation-- such as the distorted, unearthly autoharp that rakes across the face of "Stipledmoon"-- it's often difficult to pinpoint exactly which musician is generating each specific noise. O'Rourke, as always, blends effortlessly into his surroundings, and though this masterful versatility makes him a valuable addition to virtually any ensemble, it can also render his individual voice rather invisible. (If he's contributed any guitar here, I must admit I don't immediately recognize it.) Consequently there's nothing on *China Is Near*-- besides its general air of restless, questing curiosity-- that stands out as distinctively "O'Rourkeian," but that certainly does little to detract from this album's molten, form-shifting splendor.

-Matthew Murphy, July 15, 2005



## Saturday, July 16, 2005 chinese democracy

"If the Americans draw their missiles and position-guided ammunition on to the target zone on China's territory, I think we will have to respond with nuclear weapons," that was the hardline from General Zhu Chenghu, dean of China's National defense University, this week. Damn. Instead of thinking about what that could mean, as I foresee our John Wayne prez moving on those folks within the next two years, I realized White Out's new disk *China Is Near* (ATP Records) had been languishing in my stacks unspun for weeks. Red Shift, the debut of Lin Culbertson and Tom Surgal (and at the time w/ Nuss of NNCK), was a sure year fav at the time of its '97 (!?) outing. Surgal's work in The Blue Humans and his two duos, that I've heard, with T.Moore are hot houses of swarming bees. Intense percussion sheets melting to embers like smores. That type of coverage is nowhere near the aqua scene he and Culbertson fashion: a glorious cast of tones and rumble beat that fills the sky for a good twenty minutes before fading out. (And on top of that, why hasn't a solo Culbertson slice been released yet?)

*China Is Near* is their third, again Jim O'Rourke is along and William Winant appears too. The vibe White Out arouses from jettisoning, surely broke down and salvaged synths is often like a hooded Henri Pousseur: black goo bubbles popping at air level, wires shorting out. While escaping into a freedom zone a few steps to the left of La Brea tar, the slo-mo pace White Out often mutates toward is a cloudy reminiscence of jazziz style. Replace the electronics with stringed radiators and a goat's horn and it'd be a guerrilla take on Marion Brown's *Afternoon of a Georgia Fawn* -- though nightfall would be settin' in. Despite the mountain shearing pummel Winant could inflect here, he tempers additions like his Alvin Curran work, adding nuanced bits of crystal and weeping glass which seem plucked from the cosmos. And really, where he and Surgal end/begin, doesn't matter. Their pot marked rolls and the chiming, raw tones of Culbertson (and O'Rourke?) are the finest strokes of torn new music aesthetic and noisecore rusttlin I've heard this year.

# WIRE

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## WHITE OUT CHINA IS NEAR

ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES CD

BY SAM DAVIES

White Out's combination of analogue synth and drums in full free flight, a kind of Suicide gone Sun Ra, caused some stir when they debuted on Ecstatic Peace with *Red Shift* in 1997. *China Is Near* sees the core duo of Lin Culbertson and percussionist Tom Sargal team up with Jim O'Rourke for the third White Out album in their eight year history. Percussionist William Winant also contributes. The salvage yard clatter of "Empty Centre" certainly bears his signature.

It takes repeated listenings for this set's irascible charm to emerge, perhaps because it doesn't push the more obvious Improv buttons of intensity and volume. "Stipledmoon" is a neat miniature based on muted overtones and distant drums. Sargal shies away from the white noise of snare drum plosives and cymbal splash, and instead zeroes in on eddying waves of tom-tom and kick drum to produce a very tonal, sonorous counterpoint to Culbertson's forays into her synth's darker recesses. Culbertson meanwhile opts not to sing on this outing — reluctant, perhaps, to crowd the mix.

"Mutinous" extends a tympani or floor-tom roll over nine minutes until all its attack has disappeared, and the drum's sound slurs into a drone. It's harassed by chirruping electronics, and the exploration suddenly finds a sense of purpose.

## The Office Ambience

- Soft Machine**  
Out-Bloody-Rageous 1967-1973 (Sony/BMG)
- Björk**  
Drawing Restraint 9 (One Little Indian)
- Mazen Kerbaj**  
Brt Vrt Zrt Krt (Al Maslakh)
- The Contemporary Jazz Quintet**  
Actions 1966-67 (Atavistic Unheard Music Series)
- Ikuu Mori**  
Myrminerest (Tzadik)
- Wolf Eyes/Hair Police**  
Live!!! (Purple Stuff cassette)
- Aoki Takamasa + Tujiko Noriko**  
28 (Fat Cat)
- Albert Kuvezin & Yat Kha**  
Re-Covers (Yat Kha)
- The Juan Maclean**  
Less Than Human (DFA)
- Jason Forrester**  
Shamelessly Exciting (Sonig)
- Tetuzi Akiyama & Günter Müller**  
Points And Slashes (Erstwhile)
- White Out with Jim O'Rourke & William Winant**  
China Is Near (ATP)
- Sensational**  
Speaks For Itself (Quatermass)
- Keluarga Kesenian Jawa RRI Yogyakarta**  
Gamelan Of Central Java: V Gaya Yogyakarta (Felmay)
- Dredd Foole**  
Kissing The Contemporary Bliss (Child Of Microtones)

Compiled by *The Wire* Sound System

## DJ Martian's Page

White Out With Jim O'Rourke - China Is Near ATP

Although by no means the first people to impose a free-jazz template over the traditional rock line-up, White Out are one of the more successful purveyors of this particular genre graft. Now augmented by Jim O'Rourke and whizz-bang percussionist William Winant, 'China Near' marks White Out's third album and serves mainly to update the sound last encountered on 'Drunken Little Mass'. Loud, tightly structured yet resolutely free range, opening track 'Ghost Mirror Image' is a meandering jazz composition that cranks up the volume then lets the various instrumental elements duke it out for supremacy. Toning it down considerably, White Out follow on with 'Lost In Grey' augmenting the subdued styling with a healthy dose of digital lambency whilst 'Stifled Moon' heats up a crucible of disparate percussive elements (including what sounds like the kitchen sink) then, under the guidance of Winant, pours them out to harden into a brittle rhythm fuelled track. Cerebral and enjoyable.....

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**White Out with Jim O'Rourke and William Winant**  
*China Is Near*  
(ATP; U.K.)

When considering freely improvised music, it helps to have an understanding of the musicians' starting point, some kind of reference. But for veteran NYC percussion-and-electronics duo White Out—the name recalls the obliterative force of a blizzard more than mere corrective paint—earthly anchors have never been of much use.

White Out's third album, *China Is Near*, is less overtly tempestuous than its predecessors, but that may be key

to its evocative success: Whereas many improvisers seem hell-bent on aggressively pursuing some universal truth, this band's music gets there under its own impulses. (Anyone who's caught one of White Out's rare live sets can attest to the unearthly way drummer Tom Sargal's arms seem to follow someone else's command.) Like Louis and Bebe Barron's 1956 soundtrack to *Forbidden Planet*, *China* speaks in an alien tongue that nonetheless conveys wonder and horror

in equal measure, especially on the deeply churning "Mutinous." Augmenting Lin Culbertson's synths with those of Jim O'Rourke and adding avant-garde percussion star William Winant to Sargal's rumble smacks of Ornette Coleman doubling his quartet for 1961's *Free Jazz*: Just because the music eludes easy description doesn't mean we can't hear it multiplying in power. And like Coleman's place in jazz then, any discussion of truly adventurous music today must include White Out.—Mike Wolf

**White Out with Jim O'Rourke and Thurston Moore plays Tonic Sat 30.**



# INDIE WORKSHOP

## White Out (with Jim O'Rourke and William Winant) ATP Recordings

At its core the musical entity known as White Out is the duo of Lin Culbertson and Tom Surgal. Since it's inception, in the fall of 1995, White Out has always warmly welcomed and often sought out the opportunity to collaborate with musicians embracing a like-minded approach to creating. Past recorded and live endeavors of White Out have seen the group collaborating with the likes of, Thurston Moore, Mike Watt, Nels Cline, William Winant and Dave Nuss (of the No Neck Blues Band).

China Is Near represents the bands third release and there first for the All Tomorrow's Parties records label (there two previous outings were released by Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace). On this release the duo of Culbertson and Surgal teams up with Chicago's favorite son the avant-genre hopping Jim O'Rourke known for his numerous solo endeavors as well as his work with Sonic Youth and experimental percussionist heavy-weight William Winant whose impressive resume boasts collaborations with Anthony Braxton, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Reich, John Cage and Cecil Taylor to name a few.

China is Near presents the listener with six tracks of varied texture all created through an intuitive improvised approach, clocking in at approximately forty-five minutes. The eight armed, four headed beast that comprises White Out on this album performs as a unified organism, which even when pulled in four directions at once is never dismembered.

Undoubtedly due to added the presence of Winant this album is dominated by a vast array of percussive texture. The percussion instruments employed by Winant and Surgal range from straight-forwards trap kits to gongs and hardware store finds such as scrap metal and chains. The implementation of these instruments results in an array of sounds and styles ranging from free-jazzesque trap kit playing, to chain rattling and metal scraping. Percussion is not relegated to the subservient role of rhythmic foundation in White Out; instead Surgal and Winant at times use their clatter to further enhance the atmosphere being created by Culbertson and O'Rourke. Invoking the spirit of Sun Ra at his most spaced-out while tripping on the side of an Interstellar highway, Culbertson and O'Rourke's analog synthesizers and treated strings gurgle, clank and buzz, at times chaotically bounding through space while at other laying thick washes of atmospheric fuzz from the cosmos or locking into rhythmic grooves, which subtly serve as alters upon which the percussion can unfold.

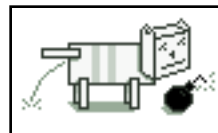
Labels such as "noise" maybe thrown at White Out as an attempt to classify their sound but none seem a genuine fit. One of the most astounding qualities of this record is the ability of the compositions to elude classification. In the end the tentacles of sound created by each individual knot themselves together and move as a force of nature to be reckoned with.

- Ryan Brown | 2005-07-26



## White Out China Is Near ATP Recordings

Take the spooky contemporary classicism of Ligeti, mix it in with the unnerving, moody electronics of Excepter and add the bold percussion of the downtown avant-garde and you might get a sense of China Is Near, the brilliant third album from the New York experimental group White Out. The band's members include multi-instrumentalist Lin Culberston, drummer Tom Surgal and none other than Jim O'Rourke, whose synthesized sounds give the CD an eerie, provocative touch. But the real star of the album could be percussionist William Winant, who's collaborated with the likes of John Cage, Yo Yo Ma and Sonic Youth. His percussion is dazzling, both furious and subtle. The album's six songs are never dull, held together by a multitude of instruments, including analog synthesizers, autoharp, bells, chains, timpani, vibes, scrap metal, springs, gongs, the works. This is a CD where description cannot do it any justice - you simply have to hear it. Easily one of the best experimental albums of the year, China Is Near can be enjoyed by fans of classical, jazz, electronic or rock.



### WHITE OUT WITH JIM O'ROURKE China Is Near, ATP

Although by no means the first people to impose a free-jazz template over the traditional rock line-up, White Out are one of the more successful purveyors of this particular genre graft. Now augmented by Jim O'Rourke and whizz-bang percussionist William Winant, 'China Near' marks White Out's third album and serves mainly to update the sound last encountered on 'Drunken Little Mass'. Loud, tightly structured yet resolutely free range, opening track 'Ghost Mirror Image' is a meandering jazz composition that cranks up the volume then lets the various instrumental elements duke it out for supremacy. Toning it down considerably, White Out follow on with 'Lost In Grey' augmenting the subdued styling with a healthy dose of digital lambency whilst 'Stifled Moon' heats up a crucible of disparate percussive elements (including what sounds like the kitchen sink) then, under the guidance of Winant, pours them out to harden into a brittle rhythm fuelled track. Cerebral and enjoyable...

# BLASTITUDE

## LIN CULBERTSON and TOM SURGAL of WHITE OUT

Lin Culbertson



Tom Surgal



I just decided to up and interview Lin Culbertson and Tom Surgal of White Out because when their Red Shift CD came out back in 1997, I bought it due to Ecstatic Peace / Forced Exposure hype and I was NOT disappointed. Of course it inevitably got relatively shelved, but I just pulled it back out and it's been in my player for days on end all over again. The opening title track was always my favorite, this 20-minute low-level crop-duster that just pitters and patters and gracefully swims along, brought to several authoritative points by Ms. Culbertson's incredible analog synth playing and space voice, brilliantly buoyed throughout by the drumming of Tom Surgal (the only other full-time member of White Out) and David Nuss from the No-Neck Blues Band. I've also got White Out's Drunken Little Mass album, with Jim O'Rourke as the third member instead of David Nuss, and it's pretty top-notch as well. Anyway, back in '97 or '98, when I was deep in the throes of "Red Shift," I had a few beers one night and I decided I would use my newly installed "e-mail" capabilities to try and e-mail some "celebrities." The first two that I e-mailed, in that random internet kind of way, were Terence McKenna (he wrote back) and . . . Lin Culbertson. She wrote back too, and with all this listening I've been doing lately, I figured what the hey, I should e-mail her again and ask White Out to do an interview for BLASTITUDE!!!!

### How did White Out form and what has your career as a band been like?

LIN: White Out came about by kismet. I acquired an analog Pro-One synth and just started experimenting with Tom one day. We recorded the jam and played it for a bunch of people. Our approach seemed very fresh at that time — a stripped down unit of synth and drums playing improv in the free tradition.

TOM: Well, basically, Lin and I had been living together for years, we were both playing with other people, so it was just inevitable that we would ultimately end up playing together. I hate to categorize what we do as a band as career. We're not that mercenary in our intent. If you are asking me to comment on the experience of playing in White Out, that's another matter. I would just say that I derive infinite pleasure from performing with this band. To be able to play out and record with musicians of such high musical caliber as Lin and Jim is nothing short of ecstasy.

### Where are you from? How did you get into music? What inspired you to stay in music? How did you meet?

LIN: I am originally from Madison Wisconsin. I was introduced to music at the age of 6 through piano lessons. I guess it took, as I have been playing keyboards ever since. Music is sustenance for me. I can't imagine not playing or writing music in some context. Tom and I met a long time ago at CBGBs. I think it was a Big Black show.

TOM: I am from Manhattan, New York. I didn't get into music, music got into me. I grew up in the cultural epicenter of the world, music was everywhere, it permeated my being. Music is a gift, it's its own greatest reward, I stay in it because I love to play and I love my band. My bosom buddy musician/actor friend Richard Edson (Sonic Youth, Konk, Stranger Than Paradise, etc.) introduced Lin to me in front of CBGBs at a Big Black show.

### For Lin: Where does that jamming synth style come from? How did you come to incorporate the synth and sing over it?

LIN: I have been experimenting with free improvisation since I was a teenager. Listening to albums by The Soft Machine, Sun Ra, Eric Dolphy, and other jazz musicians sparked my interest. I realized that there was an exciting potential to free music and it really appealed to me. Brian Eno in his Roxy Music incarnation and Suicide were also major inspirations. My style derives from turning on the power and then just letting it rip. I don't consciously think about what I am doing. I guess that's the point. You want to get to a place of not thinking. The singing just sort of escapes my vocal chords. All of a sudden, I notice I'm singing. It is a natural progression within the improvisation.

### What was it like working with David Nuss on the Red Shift album?

TOM: That was cool. David was this speed metal transplant kid from Texas, when I first met him. He was really into expanding his musical horizons. He was just getting into doing improv. He brought a lot of enthusiasm to the proceedings. He was an artistic convert, excited by the possibilities of this new avenue of creative expression, which lent that record a kind of raw, unbridled quality.

LIN: Fun. Playing with two drummers creates a lot of energy to move through. I play percussively, and usually connect with the drums when I am improvising, so having double drums was exhilarating.

### What was it like working with Jim O'Rourke on the Drunken Little Mass album?

LIN: A totally different energy, delicate and introspective. Jim is a very sensitive improviser who really listens and reacts in an unexpected and original way. It's a blast to play with him.

TOM: Working with Jim was awesome. We really hardly knew him at the time of that recording. I had done a show with Thurston and him previously, and was really struck by the sympathetic nature of his playing. "Drunken Little Mass" will always be of great sentimental and artistic value to us, because it marks the first

time that White Out and Jim ever played together, and of course we've been playing and recording together ever since. In addition to that, Jim has subsequently relocated to New York, and has become one of our favorite people and a close and valued friend.

**Those are really the only two releases I know of yours, and that's over a six-year period. Are there any 'lost albums' out there? Any vinyl?**

LIN: We are on a compilation curated by Elliott Sharp and released by the Electronic Music Foundation called "State of the Union". We are on an anti-Bush compilation by Passive Aggressive Records that should be released soon.

TOM: Well, we have a new album coming out. It's a collaboration with Jim and classical percussionist William Winant, which I regard as our apotheosis to date. As far as the dearth of White Out material, I don't know man, you gotta play out for a while, establish your sound, and build an audience before you put something out. Plus there's the obvious budgetary constraints. Yeah we've done a couple of other tracks for some compilations. No unfortunately there is no vinyl, because of economic necessity we've been forced into the digital realm, the medium of Satan.

**For Lin, How about Quasi Sutro? Did you ever put anything out besides that cassette on Freedom From? For Tom, any items in your discography besides the White Out and various projects with Thurston Moore? Do you play in any other situations?**

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**I always like to ask this (you can leave some blank): Last 5 records listened to, last 5 movies watched, last 5 books or magazines read.**

LIN

Listed in chronological not qualitative order.

RECORDS

1. Nick Drake "Pink Moon"
2. Matmos "The Civil War"
3. Excepter "KA"
4. Ustad Ali Akbar Khan "Master Musician of India"
5. Xenakis "La légende d'Er"

FILMS

1. Y Tu Mama Tambien dir. Alfonso Cuaron
2. My Life Without Me dir. Isabel Coixet
3. Dirty Pretty Things dir. Stephen Frears
4. Les Destinées dir. Olivier Assayas
5. Aberdeen dir. Hans Petter Moland

BOOKS

1. Issue Magazine #7
2. "Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism" Daniel Pinchbeck
3. "Welcome to the Desert of the Real" Slavoj Zizek
4. "City of Night" John Rechy
5. "Idoru" William Gibson

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**Plans for the future, announcements for the present, strategies for getting Bush out of office, anything else you'd like to say?**

LIN: I am ready to help the opposition mobilize for any candidate who has a chance of defeating George W. I am numb from the constant attempts by the Bush administration to dismantle our current social and environmental programs. Then there is the insanity of the Iraq War... For White Out, a new recording has been completed and we plan on playing a lot more shows in the near future.

LIN: Quasi Sutro seems to work very slowly. There is a fair amount of material right now, so maybe there will be another release soon. I have played in many, many bands in the past, but most of the material is out of print.

TOM: Well, I played with Rudolph Grey and the Blue Humans for many years. In the course of that band I collaborated with Charles Gayle, Arthur Doyle, and Wilbur Morris among others. That particular union sired at least 2 albums and some singles. I also played on a Lydia Lunch record and some other stuff that doesn't leap to mind. I play in many other situations, but it is always in the context of White Out. White Out is by inherent nature a cooperative that revolves around the core nucleus of Lin and me. Frequent other collaborators include Jim, Thurston, Mike Watt, and Nels Cline.

**What interests do you have outside of music?**

TOM: I am a filmmaker and that interests me greatly. Although I don't really perceive film as existing outside of music, for me they are inexorably intertwined. I have directed a variety of music videos for bands like The Blues Explosion, Gary Young, and Pavement. My latest effort is a Dogma inspired video for Sonic Youth, in which I employ actors to portray a fictitious band on tour, arguing in a van, with Sonic Youth on the radio.

LIN: I have too many interests demanding my attention. I take photographs and recently have started making some experimental videos. I also do illustration and graphic design for dosh.

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TOM

It's all too much of a continuum. I can't remember any specific order, here are some salient recent samplings.

RECORDS

1. Ulrich Gumpert Workshop "Echos Von Karolinenhof"
2. Todd Dockstader "Quartermass"
3. Cheikha Remitti "Ghir El Baroud"
4. David Stoughton "Transformer"
5. Gal Costa "Cantar"

FILMS

1. Later August Early Spring dir. Olivier Assayas
2. Orphans dir. Peter Mullan
3. Innocence dir. Paul Cox
4. Te Amo dir. Sergio Castilla
5. Aberdeen dir. Hans Petter Moland

BOOKS

1. "Sermons and Soda Water" John O'Hara
2. "Love with a Few Hairs" Mohammed Mrabet
3. "West of Rome" John Fante
4. "An Unspeakable Betrayal" Luis Bunuel
5. "Kicking" Leslie Dick

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TOM: I mentioned our new album, and there has been some talk about us touring more extensively, but you know man, we're improvisers, we never plan on anything. Bush is a war criminal who should be dealt with accordingly. DESTROY ALL MONSTERS. I've probably said too much already, I should just shut the fuck up and let the music speak for itself.



# SKYSCRAPER <sup>14</sup>



## White Out with Thurston Moore & Jim O'Rourke

by Brad Cohen

New York City's White Out (percussionist Tom Surgal and multi-instrumentalist Lin Culbertson) layer upon layer a psych-improv space-jazz constellation of intergalactic mind-fucked and mind-soothing magnitude. In this rare interview, White Out is joined by honorary members Thurston Moore and Jim O'Rourke (of Sonic Youth fame) for an engaging and comedic conversation which touches on topics as diverse as Sun Ra, capitalism, gamelan, No Wave, and European electronic music.

### FORMAL INTRODUCTION

The ambience inside the Lower East Side, New York City jazz and experimental institution Tonic was decidedly different than that in January of 2001, when my initial encounter with White Out first transpired. That night, White Out (percussionist Tom Surgal and analog synthesizer / flute / electric autoharp multi-instrumentalist Lin Culbertson) intricately mind-melded their psych-jazz free improvisations with that of guitarist's Nels Cline's galvanizing maelstrom of jazz-bent shards and atonal, fractured crashes. This evening though, White Out would be paired with oft-collaborators Thurston Moore and Jim O'Rourke of another NYC institution, Sonic Youth. While Cline was easily accessible on that frigid winter night for an interview prior to his two sets - the first with White Out then followed by his and drummer Gregg Bendian's deconstructionist testimonial to John Coltrane's and Rashied Ali's revolutionary free jazz piece from 1967, *Interstellar Space*, Moore appeared more elusive. Enveloped between sets by peers, well-wishers and throngs of touristy SY fans hoping for an autograph on their copy of *Murray Street*, I finally was able to squeeze my slight frame through the horde in order to retrieve a few quotes from Thurston about the experimental purveyors in White Out, who through his Ecstatic Peace label, has released WO's two records - the ethereally-damaged, space-is-the-place, percussive / synthesizer tsunami, *Red Shift* with David Nuss (No Neck Blues Band) and the starry-eyed, liquidy sonic shape-shifting patterns and textured dreamscape of *Drunken Little Mass*, accompanied by O'Rourke on Powerbook and guitar. The following is an account of the night's strange and comedic happenstance.

### THURSTON vs. WHITE OUT

With his signature tall, lanky frame sprawled on the steps of the minuscule Tonic stage, Thurston sits relaxed with guitar in tow and a menagerie of effects pedals situated every which way. Speaking candidly about White Out's trademark right-wing politics, his contribution to its sound and his diminishing finances, the audacious Moore leaves no stone unturned in this revealing exchange.

### Can you give me your thoughts on White Out and their impetus in this experimental / improv milieu?

**Thurston:** White Out? They're the best band in New York right now, besides Liquid Liquid...and Gang Gang Dance. [*Ed. note* - Coincidentally, Liquid Liquid is playing this same evening for first time in nearly twenty years at The Knitting Factory]. [White Out have] kind of taken over where No Neck [Blues Band] used to reign.

### What do you add to White Out's sound?

Primitive noise...abstract and hectic squalor is what I am trying to go for. Also kind of like a new age melody. Perhaps you've heard it (Laughs)?

### I absolutely did hear the new age melody (Laughing). Anyway, is Ecstatic Peace releasing White Out's next record?

I don't have any more money to put out records so I am just putting out free music now on the Web.

### Is White Out involved in your new venture?

No. White Out are capitalists. They have their eye on a more commercial [fare].

### AFTER HOURS

While the early set was ostensibly a transmission of subtly played, cosmic nuances, the late set proved to be the antithesis - an equilibrium-destroying cacophonous sun ship. Anchored by Surgal's effortless and feathery ebbing/flowing jazz beats and percussive clatter, Culbertson's convulsing analog synth swooshes, O'Rourke's electronic knob-twiddling and Moore's searing string-bending resonance, this White Out collective established the precedent for *now*-psych-improv bands like Black Dice, whether they know it or not.

### BAD TIMING

Bassist for Sonic Youth; producer extraordinaire for Wilco, Sonic Youth, Stereolab, Superchunk, et.al; acclaimed solo ventures; erstwhile White Out member. After the show, I find Jim, with equipment and *All About Jazz* newspaper in hand, crouched down in a corner. Not nearly as accommodating and honest as Thurston, while exuding an overtly pretentious ("I'm in White Out - who the hell are you?") eccentric vibe, I humbly request his thoughts about White Out.

**Jim:** White Out bridge a certain ways of improvising that I don't find with other people; I could say "groups," but it's not that -- with White Out it's "other people."

[While speaking to Jim, Thurston is exiting Tonic, glances over to myself and Jim and reacts to this writer fishing for more juicy quotes about White Out].

**Thurston:** Oh, come on!!!

### **SKYSCRAPER MEETS WHITE OUT AT 1AM**

After much prodding and waiting, Lin and I plant ourselves at the hot dog counter at Tonic. With Sex Mob and MTO leader Steven Bernstein's gale-force trumpet blows percolating in the main space, Tom counting the evening's earnings, Mark Ibold (Pavement, Free Kitten) stopping by to say hello, Kim Gordon bidding adieu to Lin and Tom, the interview with the elusive White Out is about to commence. If it just wasn't for Bernstein's blaring horn, maybe I can hear a fucking thing.

**Earlier, When I asked Thurston for a quote about White Out, he claimed you guys are capitalists. Any truth to this rumor?**

**Tom:** He said we were capitalists?? No... we are communists! Our music is communistic - it's total parity. There is no leader, just followers.

**Lin:** That's pretty funny that he would say something like that. Playing this kind of music?...

**TS:** ...we're in it for the money!

**Thurston also said White Out are the best NYC band besides Liquid Liquid.**

**TS:** Besides Liquid Liquid? Thurston doesn't even like them.

**(I GOT A WHITE OUT BLOCK) INSIDE MY HEAD  
*Red Shift* and *Drunken Little Mass* were both recorded live in concert, not in a studio...**

**TS:** No, no, no...they are not both live. The second one [*Drunken*] is mostly studio - half studio, half live.

**LC:** Well the first one [*Red Shift*] is actually studio (recorded), too.

**Ok...I'm embarrassed. My "fact checking" needs some work.  
[laughter]**

**LC:** They sound live and there are no overdubs. On *Drunken*, there are pieces recorded from two live shows -- here at Tonic and The Cooler.

**TS:** We just recorded a third album, which is all studio-recorded and we are just mixing it. That's with Jim and percussionist William Winant. I used to have a trio with him and Thurston. William played on [Sonic Youth's] *Goodbye Twentieth Century*.

### **IMPROV LOGIC**

**What is the White Out process of recording and playing live?**

**TS:** It is completely improvised.

**LC:** There isn't even any speaking beforehand... "Ok, let's start the second one quiet." Whatever happens...

**TS:** We try to do it as spontaneously as possible. We don't even practice - we practice independently and don't like to get together unless it's for recording or a show. It is kind of like ceremonial music.

**LC:** [The improvising] makes it a little more difficult because if we are playing with someone we haven't really played with before, it can take a minute to figure out where they are coming from.

### **WHITE OUT vs GUITARS HORNS ELECTRONICS**

**Is it difficult to adapt to certain players?**

**TS:** It's all difficult...

**LC:** ...and different with some people's styles. One time we played with a sax and that was a little difficult. For me, it was so about the notes that I felt I was stepping on the sax with really strange sounds. We've really only played with horns once and guitars once...

**TS:** No, no - We've played with Nels [Cline], Elliott Sharp, Thurston, Mike Watt...it's different every time. We try to eschew as many preconceived notions as possible. That was a good show. There were two saxes -- Sabir Mateen and Daniel Carter [TEST]. Sometimes it feels like all other kinds of music are archaic, it's all so formulaic. This is music of the future, you know? We try to clear our minds of all thoughts before we play. Actually, we have no thoughts...we're stupid...

**Can you name other people you would like to collaborate with?**

**LC:** Keith Rowe...

**TS:** Phil Wachsman, European electronics people...anybody.

### **PRE-WHITE OUT: PUNK, NO WAVE, JAZZ, GAMELAN**

**TS:** I grew up in Manhattan. [Talking to Lin] You didn't - you were listening to it [No Wave] in Wisconsin.

**LC:** I saw [Glenn] Branca.

**TS:** At thirteen, I got really into jazz and when punk hit, I got really into that.

**LC:** [*To Tom*] You did, right? You saw The Dead Boys...

**TS:** ...Voidoids, Dead Boys...I'd also go to jazz lofts and see people like Sam Rivers. When I was growing up places were cheaper to go to.

**TS:** [*To Lin*] You were into The Stooges...and you also studied Gamelan.

### **Gamelan?**

**LC:** It's an Indonesian orchestra - gongs. It's actually the most incredible, amazing sound.

**TS:** Lou Harrison, who just died, composed a lot for Gamelan orchestra.

### **A WHITE OUT SUPREME**

**Did Gamelan and jazz contribute to your interest in improvisational music?**

**LC:** I was doing free improv when I was in high school...

**TS:** All music informs our playing, everything we've ever heard...

**LC:** The idea of doing improvisation is that you have to come to it from some place to go to another.

### **SPACE IS THE PLACE**

**The music press usually refers to Sun Ra when something is written about White Out.**

**LC:** I know and it's funny -- I did listen to Sun Ra a lot. But I think it's because of the analog synthesizer.

**TS [*to Lin*]:** Nah, you don't really sound like Sun Ra. You have your own individual voice. It's just that you use a Pro-One synthesizer; it's a cheap umbrella reference. But hey, if you're going to have a reference, it might as well be Sun Ra!

**LC:** Yeah! That's a pretty good reference!

### **EUROPE vs NYC**

**What is your take on the evolving jazz/experimental scene in here in NYC? And where does White Out fit in?**

**TS:** I am more interested in what's happening in Europe - it's more akin to what we're doing and what we sound like.

**LC:** [White Out] is not really straight jazz.

**TS:** We don't have blues inflections, we don't have any obvious jazz references. We are as much impacted by new music and contemporary classical as jazz. That's very much what's happening with people like Paul Lovens, Evan Parker, Peter Brotzmann and Alexander Von Schlippenbach. I've discovered these people fairly late in the game. It was like hearing something parallel to what we are doing. So, we are more attuned to what is going on in Europe than what is happening here. But that's just my pretentious take.

#### **DIE LIKE A WHITE OUT**

**Can you describe the sound of White Out?**

**TS:** Big...bigger.

**LC:** The sound of White Out? I would say it's like conversation [Tom chuckles]. I think it's like speaking voices...

**TS:** ...really strident tones of voices. [laughs]

**You are the core members of White Out. Have you thought of adding a permanent member - maybe Jim?**

**TS:** We've been playing with Jim for the last couple of years.

**So is Jim an "honorary member?"**

**TS:** He hasn't entered into a fasting pact with us yet; he hasn't signed anything in blood. But we know he's after the big money so hopefully he'll continue to collaborate with us. It's just a cooperative -- White Out revolves around us two as the nucleus and whoever we play with is White Out.

**LC:** It seems nice to have a sort of flux and add a third member. Duos are nice but trios are particularly nice.

**TS:** Two's a crowd.

**What is on the WO agenda for the future?**

**LC:** No plans...

**TS:** We have no plans. We have no plans when we play. We have another record and we are really into that. I think it's the best thing we've done yet - best recording. We recorded it at Sonic Youth's studio and our friend Aaron [Mullan] engineered it and Jim helped out a little with the production. It's definitely our apotheosis to date. [To Lin] Don't you think it's the best thing we've done?

**Lin:** Yeah, I think so.

**Thurston said he couldn't put out your next record on Ecstatic Peace because he has no more money to put out records.**

**TS:** Well, it gets back to the capitalist thing - he can't afford us anymore.

**LC:** We need the million dollar advance!

**Lastly, this is actually one of the first interviews you've ever done as White Out??**

**TS:** What can I tell you? You play this kind of music you get used to being ignored. We're happy we get nice size audiences and if people want to write about us, that's fine. And if they don't, we have no control over that. It's a hard one for us to comment on. Their loss, our gain.



FEBRUARY 25 - MARCH 3, 2005 / VOL. 27 / NO. 14

**CALENDAR** MUSIC Rock & Pop

### **PICKS OF THE WEEK**

#### **White Out, Dos, Knives at Spaceland.**

Maybe it's the transformation the country's undergoing at the hands of Donald Rumsfeld, maybe it's the apocalyptic weather or maybe it's just a fad, but for whatever reason L.A. has been swarming with noise action for the past few moons. Who cares why, so long as it brings White Out, a radical NYC improv duo comprising the multi-instrumentalist Lin Culbertson and percussionist Tom Surgal, joined by Sonic Youth's noise-rock god Thurston Moore, Surgal's frequent collaborator (remember the "New Music Mondays" series?), for a set of otherworldly, prayerful and erotic terrorism. It's the new psychedelia, clear-eyed, clean and ready for war. Get there early — before punk legends Mike Watt and Kira Roessler thud your pud as the two-bass Dos, and Knives, featuring L.A.'s own incomparable harsh-noise maniac Phil Blankenship, slit you open and drink crude blood straight from your fucking aorta. (Oliver Hall)





collected scribblings on music, film and other obsessions

## White Out Featuring Jim O'Rourke, Drunken Little Mass (Smells Like Records)

Instruments scream, shriek and squawk, ravaged and assaulted by unwise but still expert hands. And yet, in all this mess there is still an unquenchable harmony. Free compositions, free forms and free rhythmic blocks of patterns, born out of jazz but verging towards avant-garde, converge into this experimental project which involves the ubiquitous Jim O'Rourke. The spooky "Fury Breath Flying At Half Mast" is reminiscent of John Coltrane's "Ascension", only it is more experimental, "Least Shred Of" contains a ghost-in-chains-wandering-around-haunted-house like noise, "Maelstrom And Tear" sounds like a spaceship fluctuating in the still air, before finally landing on planet earth, while "Cloaking" is made up by a texture of sinuous flutes. This album of fractured jazzbo grooves is an experiment not to repeat at home. White Out featuring Jim O'Rourke can get away with it and sound like geniuses, you'd sound like poor chancers doing weird disconnected jangling and rattling noises.

--anna battista



## White Out with Jim O'Rourke / Drunken Little Mess / Ecstatic Peace (CD)

In the entire history of album titles, very few have suited their content as well as Drunken Little Mess suits the abstract compositions of noise terrorists White Out and producer extraordinaire Jim O'Rourke. Released on Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace label, Drunken Little Mess has an awful lot in common with Sonic Youth's recent avant garde offerings on their SYR imprint. Recorded live at three separate locations, this is a skewed melange of synths, tape hiss, live guitar, drums, bass, flute and Jim O'Rourke's severely punishing PowerBook noodlings. Make no mistake, this is abrasive stuff, not suited for everybody's tastes, so if you automatically buy anything with O'Rourke's name on it, exercise caution here. "Least Shred Of" and "Cloaking" are short, stabbing slabs of pure noise, whereas "Maelstrom and Tear" and "Fury Breath Flying at Half Mast" are full-blown noise rock operettas replete with savage movement and brief bouts of solitude. Fans of Merzbow or Atari Teenage Riot might want to explore the sheer sonic revolt of Drunken Little Mess; the rest of you might want to steer clear and first explore Mr. O'Rourke's more digestible solo material.

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CANADA'S MUSIC AUTHORITY

## Orderly Chaos 2001 Year in Review

### White Out (w/ Jim O'Rourke)

**Drunken Little Mass** (Ecstatic Peace)  
Eric Hill: For every ten horribly unsatisfying improv recordings there is one like this that captures dynamism, emotion, leaps of faith rewarded, abandon met with trust.

By Eric Hill

April 06, 2001

Free jazz crashes into the open desktop window of Powerbook improv on this excellent new recording from NYC duo Lin Culbertson and Tom Surgal, collectively known as White Out. Here, the multi-instrumentalist and infinite percussionist invite Jim O'Rourke into their parlour with his Powerbook and guitar for an improv session that colours outside the admittedly broken lines of free jazz. They dispense with the "everything turned on and up all of the time" mode of improvisation, which often makes listening to such recordings as exhausting as paddling upstream. On the lengthy first piece, "Fury Breath Flying At Half Mast," the initial storm of analogue synth, octoped percussion and Powerbook squiggles blows over around the six or seven minute mark, settling in to a gentle, yet menacing, drone that the players tiptoe through with acoustic guitars and miniature gongs held aloft. The rest of the album meets the same high standard; Surgal especially impresses with his keen sense of where all of the space/psych sounds seem to be going, meeting them with just the right beats in hand. If this isn't the soundtrack for the upcoming Barbarella remake, well it ought to be.



## WHITE OUT

**Album** > Drunken Little Mass  
(ECSTATIC PEACE!; [www.smellslkerecords.com](http://www.smellslkerecords.com))

**Rating** > 4

**Who?** NY improvisers Lin Culbertson and Tom Surgal, with aid from Chicago renaissance man Jim O'Rourke.

**Sounds like:** By turns blissful, tense and chaotic bursts of freeform inspiration. An eclectic excursion into psychedelic excess and arresting minimalism.

**How is it?** A one-take, one-of-a-kind jam for the ages.

**Kindred spirits:** Sun Ra, Supersilent, Taj-Mahal Travellers

## JAZZ

Section by Tad Hendrickson

### OTHER DIMENSIONS

Truly on the outer fringes of improvised/avant-garde music, New York's *White Out* (Ecstatic Peace!, c/o Smells Like Records; 201.659.8956; [info@smellslkerecords.com](mailto:info@smellslkerecords.com)) hinges on the analog drone of keyboardist Lin Culbertson and the free-time drumming of Tom Surgal, the latter who has worked with Thurston Moore on a number of occasions. The duo ups the ante on *Drunken Little Mass* by bringing in producer/rising-star-avant-gardist Jim O'Rourke to further mess things up. Culbertson and O'Rourke are constantly manipulating the sound of their instruments, and sometimes it's hard to figure out who's doing what. But whatever it is, it works. Oscillating sounds weave in and around drones and unrecognizable squiggles. Surgal's drumming is solid throughout, his odd accents and stumbling rhythms prodding his partners in their efforts to build an intricate, ever-evolving sound collage.

## WHITE OUT WITH JIM O'ROURKE

### Drunken Little Mess

Having spent most of the fall trying to sleep to Bruce Haack's warped-tape scrawl for kiddie shows run by robots in sweaters, I can tell you that little short of stuffing a theremin down Ernie Kovacs' dead throat could impress me where loop-based electronics are concerned. So imagine my surprise when White Out does just that. Scattershot percussionist Tom Surgal and analog synth/autoharp agitator Lin Culbertson seem to have a good time riding the vibrating third rail of surrealist time-signing, provoking a siren twirl from *Drunken's* first track (the elephant death amid tolling bells of "Fury Breath Flying At Half Mast") to its last (the Dolfy-esque "Cloaking"). The quietly fluid, flute-filled closer doesn't stay sweet, somnolent or flutey too long, winding its way into intergalactic skronk and demise. Somewhere between Culbertson's blissful trills and opposing synth mutations is Jim O'Rourke splattering jolts of ground-up guitar and Powerbook. But I'm certain that, combined with Culbertson's molten misery, the noise they provoke is horror that would make Hammer Studios proud. Still, Surgal is the star of this show. He pounds, clicks and bitch-slaps his cymbals with the military precision and humor found only in the best avant drummers like Philip Wilson. [Ecstatic Peace!, POB 6179, Hoboken NJ 07030]

—a.d. amorosi

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## WHITE OUT WITH JIM O'ROURKE DRUNKEN LITTLE MASS

*Ecstatic Peace/US/CD*

Having collectively collaborated with a who's who of the NYC art set (i.e. Christian Marclay, We, Thurston Moore and Elliot Sharp), White Out—a duo of Lin Culbertson (analog synthesizers/electronics, autoharp, flute) and Tom Surgal (percussion)—are joined on the aptly-titled *Drunken Little Mass* by Jim O'Rourke (PowerBook, guitar) for an improvised intergalactic escapade through the nether regions of the universe. The 17-minute "Fury Breath Flying at Half Mast" gets Saturnian on yo' ass, suggesting a meeting of Sun Ra, John Fahey and Add N to (X), while "Maelstrom and Tear" combines O'Rourke and Culbertson's echoing analog sorcery with the Fourth World flute and bell-tones of Pharoah Sanders. Like our drunken little mass, it's a universe of chaos, tension and beauty. *Alexis Georgopoulos*

january 31 – february 6, 2001 | the guide to your week | [www.villagevoice.com](http://www.villagevoice.com)

# voice choices

## MUSIC

### Wednesday 31

**WHITE OUT** The analog synth-percussion improv team of Lin Culbertson and Tom Surgal are high-contrast texturalists all the way; whoever plays with them (tonight, guitarist Nels Cline) is likely to be in the position of Daffy Duck having the backgrounds erased and redrawn behind him. Also: Cline and Gregg Bendian's tribute to Coltrane's *Interstellar Space*, not the world's easiest record to cover. **Tonic**, at 8. (Wolk)



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## **soundcheck**

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### **White Out with Jim O'Rourke**

Drunken Little Mass

ECSTATIC PEACE #96B CD

In their first trio incarnation, White Out were a tumult of percussion and tortured keyboards. *Drunken Little Mass* is their second recording for Ecstatic Peace, and the first since losing percussionist David Nuss to his fulltime role in The No-Neck Blues Band. That still leaves the surviving duo one percussionist in Tom Sural, alongside keyboardist Lin Culbertson. All the tracks are live improvisations with no overdubs, recorded in New York. Freeform electronics dominate this time round, but Culbertson's distinctive synth — grinding child-simple melodies that bring to mind some of Sun Ra's solo wig-outs — keeps things more jazz than Merzbow. Sural plays a kit augmented with gongs and percussive devices, while Jim O'Rourke, guesting on four of the six tracks, brings up the noise with guitar and Powerbook.

Their garish, slightly tongue in cheek electronic manipulations bring to mind the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. The lack of sophistication is endearing. The atmosphere significantly alters only when O'Rourke moves onto guitar, suspending single, ringing notes high above the murky pulse of electronics. When he starts to pick a slow, desolate blues, Sural draws a high-pitched whistle out of his percussion from behind the slow wheeze of muffled electronics, and Culbertson breaks into long moans and cries. Elsewhere, the electronics are more self-consciously cosmic, recalling the great devotional works of the Krautrock period or the apocalyptic sci-fi of MEV's *Leave The City*. Even so, as a woozy comic book soundtrack to the end of days, it's an absolute hoot.

DAVID KEENAN

66 The Wire



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## **Also this week**

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### **Elliot Sharp Meets White Out**

(Tonic, Wed 7) White Out plays free, avant-psychedelia the way we like it: menacing and gentle by turns, pretty as a galaxy coming into existence. Tom Sural and Lin Culbertson know the outer spaceways pretty well; their new CD, *Drunken Little Mass* (Ecstatic Peace)—recorded with guitarist Jim O'Rourke—is loose and lovely. This collaboration with guitarist Sharp is promising—as long as he can breathe in outer space.

# BB GUN

ISSUE #5  
•2001•

### **White Out with Jim O'Rourke** **Drunken Little Mass** **Ecstatic Peace**

Over the last few years, White Out's Tom Sural (drums) and Lin Culbertson (electronics, autoharp, voice treatments) have played both as a duo and with a series of collaborators such as Thurston Moore, Kevin Drumm, Elliott Sharp and Nels Cline. On their new CD they are joined on several tracks by Jim O'Rourke (guitar, Powerbook). The result is phenomenal. While echoes of Sun Ra and 20th century electronic composers can be heard, the sound of White Out is a unique voice in improvised music. The constantly shifting textures change from sheer incendiary power to beautiful and hypnotic drones all focused through the intensity of the playing. The music crackles with energy, sometimes taking you into another world with trance-like passages that slowly move into a ferocious assault of sound played with an amazing spirit and freedom by musicians who really listen. The interplay between Sural's dynamo drumming, Culbertson's ethereal soundscapes and the tonal colorings contributed by O'Rourke take the music beyond boundaries, making categories such as free jazz, avant garde and experimental rock become meaningless. This is space music for the millennium. Essential! - Simon Bodger



## AVANT!

Space is definitely the place where much of New York trio **WHITE OUT** hail from. **Red Shift** (Ecstatic Peace! ★★★), a free jazz/cosmo-ambient freakout that smacks of Arkestral greatness, retains a '90s buzz. Made up of Tom Surgal, Lin Culbertson and David Nuss of No Neck Blues Band fame, White Out's thin, pale roots are dangling in the dark soup of ESP-Disk orientated improv squawk and splutter. No doubt if eccentric ESP-Disk producer Bernard Stollman was still in the record business, he'd have signed up White Out like a shot.

VOX MAY 1998 79

### ap recommends...

(WE GOT THE MUSIC IN US)

#### WHITE OUT • Red Shift

A combustible union of free jazz, exploratory electronics and *kosmische* ambience, *Red Shift* eludes pigeonholes like Barry Sanders dodges tacklers. What a son-of-a-bitches brew. (Ecstatic Peace/Forced Exposure; fe@shore.net)



White Out  
*Red Shift*  
Ecstatic Peace

Lin Culbertson, David Nuss and Tom Surgal combine their NYC legacies with White Out. The combination of two free jazz style percussionists and Lin's spaced out keyboard noodling, transport this lucky listener to a galaxy where Sun Ra would feel right at home. Space is the place, *baby!* - BB



#### WHITE OUT - *Red Shift* (Ecstatic Peace!)

Having logged in enough Ecstatic Peace! advertisement appearances to have finally earned their merit badge, White Out throws the doors open to the world at large with their hip debut turn. They are a trio of non-idiomatic minds with big poppa/Blue Human Tom Surgal and No-Necker David Nuss pattering on the skins behind the moog/autoharp/vocalesque evocations of the otherworldly Lin Culbertson. When I caught these fellers in action two years ago, they floated rather abstractly in front of me, occasionally kicking up clouds of toxic fumes but ultimately failing to obliterate any brain cells. This album, however, is an altogether different affair. Perhaps on that spring evening I wasn't hearing all the nuances properly, or maybe the trio was feeling a little too earthbound, but on the five tracks that make up *Red Shift* (recorded live in 1996), White Out provides a clinic in the art of improvisatory astral projection. Right from the getgo, I know they're taking me on a space ride that I want to be a part of: rattling, frenetic, free-styled drumming and Jay Dillon-style autoharp confusion that gives way to bubbling moog burps and some spookily reverbed female warbles. The shit gets totally ripped when the moog sharpens its blasts and starts slashing noise-sword cross-stitches through the air. Nebulas burst open and the mothership connection, with Sun Ra leaning over the dashboard, lands on your head like a big baggy hat. While not clearly straight-up improv, White Out come across as too double-jointed to neatly qualify as any other breed of species. The picture becomes slightly clearer on the more pharmaceutically inclined "Floggin Breath of Dread", where pillowy flute dives and Patti Waters-esque moans are injected into the ambrosiatic cocktail. It's almost a kraut-induced ride (think the early anarcho-stylings of Tangerine Dream or Kluster) wrapped in a stark black/white ESP wild-ass package. Deep, penetrating sounds the likes of such you have never heard before in your life. (Chris Crowson)

90 • Tuba Frenzy

## MAGNET

Volume 6

Number 34

### EXPERIMENTAL AUDIO RESEARCH

Millennium Music

**WHITE OUT**

Red Shift

**RAIN**

Sycamore

NYC trio White Out achieves a more explicitly spaced-out vibe; Lin Culbertson's flute and wordless vocals are soaked in reverb, and the polychromatic blend of her breathy flute and plastic-toned synthesizer with the wall-to-wall rattle of David Nuss and Tom Surgal's drums suggests they've spent some quality time studying the methods of Sun Ra.

MAGNET 67

# OPPROBRIUM #5 [JULY 1998]

WHITE OUT Red Shift CD [Ecstatic Peace] Evidence of some healthy crossbreeding between NYC noise/improv/way out musical camps, White Out is a trio of Lin Culbertson (previous experience unknown), David Nuss (NNCK) and Tom Surgal (Blue Humans). The basic approach is two percussionists and synthesiser, though flute, mutated vocalising and autoharp get thrown in the mix as well. This does little to prepare the listener for the resulting sounds, which veer from new wave New Thing to Cluster jamming with a three-armed Milford Graves. By turns exciting, aggressive and irritating, White Out are certainly not dull. Though the titles of the five pieces suggest an oneiric impulse, overall they are far from restful. The hyper-percussive onslaught of Mr Surgal is augmented by the No-Necked One, which makes tapping your toe in time to the music pretty much a guaranteed shortcut to RSI. Ms Culbertson seems pretty adept at coaxing any sound you can imagine, and a few I never previously did from her synth (analogue, natch), while murmuring along in a very spacey style. The improvisational aspect of the music is strengthened by the recording method, all live and crystal clear thanks to NZ's own Brent McLachlan. All in all, a refreshing breath of fresh free air from the Big Apple. —Bruce

## THE WIRE

ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC

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### Foot

Foot  
GOD BLESS RECORDS NOIR009 CD

### Thurston Moore & Tom Surgal

Not Me  
FOURTH DIMENSION FD0057 CD

### White Out

Red Shift

Surgal's crisp and fluid drumming gets more space to expand on *Red Shift*. He's joined by Lin Culbertson and David Nuss, collectively known as White Out — a nod to Ciccone Youth's *Whitey Album*? Recorded live in New York in 1996, most of the tracks are rooted more in free jazz/improv traditions than the other two CDs. The playing is busily interactive, trading in incident rather than ambience, though that's not to say the group can't create and sustain an atmosphere. Foot envelops you, *Not Me* infiltrates you, *Red Shift* requires you to listen, rather than just absorb, and it's worth the effort.

BARRY WITHERDEN

The Wire 59

## WHITE OUT

### Red Shift

Ecstatic Peace/Import

Das Quälende mit dem Angenehmen verbinden. Unwahrscheinlichkeiten zulassen. Dem Trio »White Out« gelingt das nicht immer. Das, was unmöglich ist, wird thematisiert und gleichzeitig wird »es« gegen die eigenen Widerstände instrumental herausgespuckt und gegurgelt.

Zusammengehalten werden die fünf Stücke von Lin Culbertson an den Keyboards/Synthesizern. Dazu Schlagzeug, Percussion und Bass von Tom Surgal und David Nuss, beides Musiker, die auch in diversen anderen Formationen in der Avantgarde-Noise-Rock-Szene New-Yorks aufgetaucht sind. (Nuss ist Mitglied der No Deck Blues Band).

Diese sich ihrer eigenen Befindlichkeit manchmal zu sehr bewußt werdende weiße Improv-Session wurde live im Dezember '96 in New York aufgenommen.

JUTTA KOETHER

**73** SPEX

10 WHITE OUT  
Like Sleep  
Red Shift

## RADIO POLITIKA

website

(Ecstatic Peace! / Forced Exposure)

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One of the most exciting free ensembles currently playing, as far as we're concerned, White Out are a trio of Lin Culbertson (electronics), David Nuss (No Neck Blues Band) and Tom Surgal (Blue Humans, Thurston Moore) - the Red Shift album's a perfect introduction into the world of free music...



## Music

### People's Choice

#### Devin Sarno (Crib, W.I.N. Records)

*The New Thing* reissue series on Impulse

The Best of the Free Design, *Kites Are Fun*

Scarnella, *Scarnella*

Elliott Smith, *XO*

Cat Power, *Moon Pix*

Low, *Songs For a Dead Pilot*

Seam, *The Pace Is Glacial*

Sonic Youth, *Silver Session (For Jason Knuth)*

Beth Capper, *Complimentary Mood Enhancer*

White Out, *Red Shift*

*Alternative to "1999": X, "Year 1"*

## 120 — POPWATCH No. 10

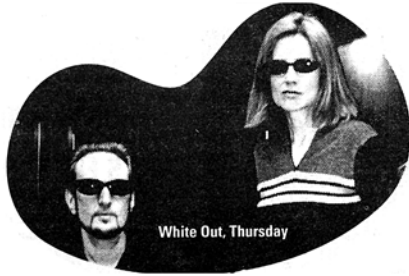
### WHITE OUT *Red Shift*

Tom Surgal of the Blue Humans is probably better known for his collaborations with Thurston Moore, but shines admirably on Blue Human releases (as well as various other collaborations) or even acting as knob-twiddler for the New Zealand trio Thela on their sophomore effort, **Argentina**. In White Out's first outing, **Red Shift**, he is fused with NNCK percussionist David Nuss and keyboard/vocalist/occasional guitar strangler Lin Culbertson, who's made her presence known in various other projects based in the Lower East Side of New York (including but not limited to **PCP's** rockin' 4-tet *Spoiler*; chapter five in the **Ecstatic Yod Ass Run/Actuel** series, Max Factory, accompanying Culbertson on that release is Surgal, Run On main wank Alan Licht, and Fred Lonberg-Holm; and also by herself as Quasi Sutro). Noisy at times with Ra-inflected percussion, White Out favor the ethereal as well, melding dreamy keyboards and vocal niceties not straying too close to conventional form. An impressive equipment list gives clues as to how this tapestry of sonic perfection was formed.

### WHITE OUT: Red Shift CD (ECSTATIC PEACE!)

In 1965, referring to his *Om* session, John Coltrane said that he used two bass players "because I want more of the sense of the expansion of time. I want the time to be more plastic." On this recent CD by New York City cosmic improvisors White Out, drummers Tom Surgal and David Nuss achieve expansions and plasticities of time that high-school-marching-band bass-drummers and majorettes simply will never be taught. In the first twenty-minute track, "Red Shift," the two create so many different pockets of percussive activity/duo-development that it would take more listenings than your average human being has the time for to become "familiar" with even half of "the piece." Somehow vocalist/non-drummer/keyboardist/tone-generator Lin Culbertson holds it all together, with perhaps the most ethereal female presence in free music since Patty Waters sang in 1965-66. Except, Ms. Culbertson hardly sings -- towards the beginning, there's a brief, echo-drenched "ah-eeeah," a sort of imitation-Morricone yodel, and some time later a Waters-ish "Bah ... bah ... bah ... bah ...," but other than that she's mostly well into the realm of propulsive instrumental cosmic goo, with synth playing and other mysterious tone generation that both buoys and chases the pattering of Nuss and Surgal. At some point, somebody even whips out an echo-drenched flute -- like the No-Neck Blues Band, White Out are not afraid to flirt with hippie signifiers.

And when I describe the drum-music herein as "pattering," feel free to take it as rain-pattering, because the playing these guys do seems almost entirely informed by nature. Sure, they learned the basic approach from Elvin Jones, Rashied Ali, Sunny Murray, et al, but White Out's rhythms and dynamics are even more wave-, wind-, leaf- and twig-like than what those masters of infinity-ruse were able to project (as they were carrying a lot of "post-bop baggage"). Nuss, who plays in the No-Neck Blues Band, and Surgal, who plays with the Blue Humans and in a duo setting with Thurston Moore, are simply two of the best free-music drummers working today, and *Red Shift* is one of the most crucial, ESP-worthy documents of American free music in a long time. I really haven't even finished absorbing the first track, and I'll be damned if it still doesn't sound completely different every single time. To me, that's the album. The other four shorter tracks are just, like, really good bonus cuts. ● (M.W.S.)



White Out, Thursday

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 12**

**White Out, Nels Cline & Devin Sarno, Upsilon Acrux at Spaceland.**

Looking up the word *improvise*, the definition reads: "to make, provide, or do with the tools and materials at hand, usually to fill an unforeseen and immediate need." Improvisation as a musical approach continues to supply sustenance to the hungry, to fill that primal appetite for the charrence, the spontaneous outburst, the sudden quiet. Improvised music is more than a category, it's an ethos, and New York City's White Out forge new ground with their blend of percussive and analog electronics. This duo, featuring veterans Tom Surgal (collaborator with such figures as Thurston Moore, Charles Gayle, Peter Brotzman) and Lin Culbertson, has established its reputation as a formidable exponent of the art of improvisation. Pushing the envelope of the musical moment, with Surgal's compelling rhythms and Culbertson's electronic atmospheres (and a special appearance tonight by Mike Watt on bass!), White Out is unignorably heartfelt and intelligent. Adding to the bill, locals Nels Cline and Devin Sarno provide a stimulation of the ether's molecular structure with their sonic stirring of texture and noise, expanding the musical spectrum of guitar and bass. San Ded Upsilon Acrux will also be appearing, making this night of free-form music a full-course meal. (Brandon LaBelle)

**CALENDAR Scoring the Clubs**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 15**

**White Out, Dot, Godzik Pink at Spaceland.**

Nearly five years along, and New Yorkers White Out are still riding their Heraclitean river. Constructed around the duo of Lin Culbertson (synths, electronically mutated vocals) and Tom Surgal (whose drumming evokes Ayler-period Sunny Murray), White Out, as documented on their Ecstatic Peace! CD *Red Shift*, can make you flash on '70s Kraut space-rock one minute and '60s revolutionary jazz boundlessness the next. So prior bills with Charles Gayle and collaborations with Thurston Moore make as much sense as tonight's connection with Mike Watt. Hang with them; it'll make sense before you know it. Also don't miss Dot, the latest identity crisis of guitarist Nels Cline, featuring Scarnella pard Carla Bozulich, Crib texturalist Devin Sarno and Farflung flinger Brandon LaBelle. And as long as you're monitoring Cline, his new largely acoustic *The Inkling* on Cryptogramophone, with Mark Dresser, Billy Mintz and Zeena Perkins, is the moodiest, most varied and most beautiful recording he's made. (Greg Burk)

**WHITE OUT *Red Shift* CD**

After dropping a couple hundred bucks on a small armful of oddball seventies private presses and reissues these past twelve months, I might—just might—be able to piece together twenty solid minutes of pristine blare from the whole lot that stand head and shoulders with any one of the five glorious freeform freakouts found on *Red Shift*. That's not to say that all avant-rock-whatever-the-fuck recordings are dull, but many of them do harbor just as many reservations as they do recommendations (see my next Goldmine ad for full details). Thankfully, this NYC trio's debut detonates one of those rare and much welcome rocket-to-the-moon improv explosions that makes otherworldly travel such a delight. Tom Surgal (Blue Humans, T. Moore associate, and bon vivant), David Nuss (No Neck Blues Band, Sound@One conspirator), and Lin Culbertson (Max Factory, Quasi Sutro) dish out a pan-percussion/electronics goulash that's pretty goddamn impressive. Add to the recipe occasional hushed-breath flute, some transcendental howls and whispers, and a half-cup of astral flash and the resulting stew will numb even the brawniest of tongues. Think of a would-be loft gathering of Shaking Ray Levi's, Voice Crack, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago to get some idea of the terrain White cover. With as strong a whip as this trio cracks,

**Audio** reviews

I'm somewhat surprised that they haven't garnered more underground press. Perhaps their no-profile image leaves 'em just a bit difficult to spot among the rest of New York City's noisy roustabouts. Until some schmoe issues a recording of Milford Graves leading the No Neck Jass Band, we're just gonna have to settle for listening to *Red Shift*. Poor, poor us. [Ecstatic Peace!] *Mike Troughan*



Apr 27-May 4, 2000 Issue No. 240

**Jazz & Experimental**

**\*Kevin Drum + White Out**

**SNOW WARNING IN EFFECT** White Out plays with Kevin Drumm at Tonic Thu 27.

More than something to sniff (you reprobates), a *whiteout* is when a blizzard becomes so furious you can't see your hand in front of your face. An apt name for the duo of Lin Culbertson (electronics and instruments) and Tom Surgal (drums). The two travel the interstellar spaceways as intuitively as you and I walk to the corner for a drink; their first-ever meeting with Drumm promises to be mind-blowing.