

an engagement with certain aspects of what people would consider to be popular music within the Ferneyhough score. That's something many people mention to me, even if they don't say it in those terms." What *Shadowtime* loses, in other words, in prioritizing the "new music" over newer, less pure musics, is this engagement with the popular.

But it also gains something in the process. Bernstein goes on to contrast Ferneyhough to "a John Adams or a Philip Glass or any number of other contemporary composers that are doing opera, who make many more concessions to a certain aspect of popular music." Bernstein continues:

I like popular music quite a lot. And I'm not a composer. Probably if I were a composer I'd be more like Kurt Weill than I would be like Brian Ferneyhough. A lot of people don't like severe, atonal music. But that's what he does. You never hear it on the radio either. Not just Brian's music, but the whole twentieth-century tradition of it rarely comes on the radio, even on the satellite radio shows. It's almost like spinach or something. I love that music. I find it very engaging. There's a lot of stuff that people enjoy and I enjoy too, that gets a lot of mileage in the New York classical and new music scene. And I understand that this is what Ferneyhough doesn't do, which is what a John Zorn, say, does. But, in the end, it seems to me that Ferneyhough's project is a very powerful one and complexly interesting, whereas some of the stuff that we all enjoy seems slighter to me.

Even if *Shadowtime* seems to place Benjamin too squarely on the side of an anti-populist Modernism, people interested in his work might benefit more from the bitter greens of Ferneyhough's uncompromising music than from the artificially sweetened fare we have come to expect in this era of guilt-free collage. That bitter taste in your mouth might just remind you of what you would have otherwise forgotten. ■

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## [MUSIC] Capsule Reviews



**CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS** by OM. *Holy Mountain Records, 2006*

THE CONTEMPORARY popular music scene is like a children's splash park, where consumers try to cool down without getting soaked. The point is to avoid commitment. The last thing an iPod owner addicted to the play of randomness wants is a song that demands too much time and space. From that perspective, OM's second album *Conference of the Birds* is perversely anachronistic. Although clocking in at only a little over a half hour, like LPs did in the 1960s, the record consists of just two fifteen minute-plus tracks. Slow to build, deliberately repetitive, and lacking in the peaks and valleys, which made the classic rock mini-operas of bands like The Beatles, The Who, and Genesis easier to sit through, "At Giza" and "Flight of the Eagle" reject the casual listener with glass-eyed disdain. If you want to derive any pleasure from these songs, you have to give yourself over to them, suspending the shuffle-mode self in favor of single-minded devotion. This is music that demands full immersion.

OM's principals, singer and bassist Al Cisneros and drummer Chris Hakius, used to be members of the highly regarded San Jose metal band Sleep, whose music was described as "stoner rock." *Conference of the Birds* treads a similar path. But the journey OM invites you to take requires something deeper than drugs. Their lyrics are loopy, yet suffused with a gravity that makes them resistant to the charge of postmodern irony. Although lines like, "grant to me—a light to see—and pilgrimage to mountain of the votaric form," don't make obvious sense, they demonstrate that "At Giza" is about something more than the impossibility of seriousness. OM's retro New Age vibe may be allegorical, but its message is still clear: listen like your life depended on it. —C.B.



**FISHERMAN STYLE**  
by *The Congos and Friends*. *Blood and Fire, 2006*.

REGGAE'S HISTORY is packed with endless variations of the same rhythm used by countless artists over the course of hundreds of songs. Each time a track gets repurposed, it ideally is somehow "versioned," or modified, to distinguish its employment in a new piece. Versioning is a practice born out of the recycling of popular rhythm tracks by Jamaican producers such as Lee Perry, who would tailor an old arrangement for a client looking for a good backing track. This laid the foundation for the compositional methodology of early hip-hop and electronic musicians, who, through the use of turntables, samplers, and eventually software, would write new songs using loops of prerecorded music.

As technology has evolved, so has the source material. Now, loop-based recordings often feature original material generated by the very same artists that use loops as the building blocks for larger works. Such has been the core practice of the editors and mixers of *Fisherman Style*, the Berlin duo Rhythm and Sound, Europe's leading interpreters of dub reggae. R&S were commissioned by Blood and Fire to edit and mix a classic one rhythm album, (a full-length album using variations of one rhythm track) using the backing track of The Congos' legendary 1977 song, "Fisherman."

While the repetitive character of the music over the course of two discs might suggest it would be awfully tedious to listen to, the impassioned, literary adaptations of the original vocal track render the sum total of the album anything but boring. Perhaps the essential element in making this record work so well is not necessarily the diversity of its vocals, but the fact that every MC provides an equally political reading of the original song's lyrics. In tandem with the one rhythm foundation of *Fisherman Style*, what results is a transcendent appreciation of the repetitive nature of work. —Joel Schalit