

unusual repertoire, like a jazz take on Schumann's "Fröhlicher Landmann" ("The Happy Peasant") that shakes the song free of its clunky, peasant-dance meter (think wooden clogs on a barn floor) and features great solos by Garzone and Crook. Karadonev's own "Rondo ala Bulgar" has joyful staccato runs that recall Brubeck, but it also incorporates a wonderfully skronky bowed bass section by Kendall Eddy. There's even an accordion on "The Island," and Karadonev's virtuosic enough to make it sound almost like a clarinet. Overall, the pianist's deep concern for the music elevates as well as restrains, placing him well outside the circle of diehard traditionalists. **Edward Batchelder**

Sören Kjærgaard
Ben Street
Andrew Cyrille

Optics

ILK 140 CD

Gunnar Halle
Jeppe Kjellberg
Steinar Nickelsen

Echidna

ILK 139 CD

Over the past eight years, the ILK label has amassed an impressive catalog of releases by musicians from the Danish creative music scene. *Optics* is pianist Sören Kjærgaard's fourth recording for the label. Like his compatriot Jakob Anderskov, Kjærgaard is a canny improviser and an explorer of the piano's interior sound-world. For this disc, recorded in New York, he enlisted the American rhythm section of bassist Ben Street and drum master Andrew Cyrille. Cyrille's presence is particularly fascinating; he cemented his reputation as the drummer for Cecil Taylor and Dave Burrell, pianists whose dense, hard-hitting approach represent virtually the antithesis of Kjærgaard's open, spacious style. Consummate percussionist that he is, Cyrille's right in there, continually engaging in dialogue, sometimes taking the lead but never overwhelming the soloist. "Cyrille Surreal" starts with an off-kilter piano motif that becomes even more off-kilter when Cyrille enters with a staggered funk rhythm that shouldn't fit in but somehow does. Although the main interaction is between Kjærgaard and Cyrille, Street's bass work is the glue that holds these excursions together. The eight compositions (including the epic title track) each have their own character and provide the players with a lot of room for exploration.

Echidna is the work of trumpeter

Gunnar Halle, guitarist Jeppe Kjellberg and Steinar Nickelsen, who plays church organ and synthesizers. Halle may be the most familiar of the three as a current member of Pierre Dørge's New Jungle Orchestra. For this release, the trio recorded eight hours of improvisations in two Copenhagen churches, then edited them down to six tracks. Perhaps reflecting the location of the recording, the mood is somber and glacially calm, at times almost funereal, as Halle's clear-toned trumpet cuts through the hazy electronic washes issuing from the guitar and keyboards. The nearest point of reference might be those early Terje Rypdal records for ECM, though there's a real group sound here rather than a heavy emphasis on the guitar. The exception is the opening track, which is the album's weak point and sounds like an extract from a Krautrock jam. **Robert Iannapolo**

Knife World

Knife World

Roaratorio ROAR-13 LP

Don't let the fact that Minneapolis's Knife World shares instrumentation with the White Stripes scare you. Their aesthetic is something like Times New Viking weaned on Kiss and Led Zepelin records. Following a self-released cassette and a five-song CD-R (four tracks from which reappear here, remixed), this vinyl-only release is their first "proper" full-length. Roaratorio's tendency towards quirky packaging is in evidence here: the LP comes inlaid with 3D goggles, the better to view the eye-gouging gatefold artwork. On the opener, the angular instrumental "Salutations from Ancient Cum," Jon Nielsen's overdubbed guitars career across Josh Journey-Heinz's frantic, top-heavy percussion, a blast of proggy overload executed with feral intensity. The riffs and percussive attack are jagged but never overly complex; there's no distraction from the intensity of the duo's forward motion—the record pretty much hurtles through space, and "Sandy Sandstone" is one of the most insanely fast journeys through riff-rock abandon these ears have heard. Even when they stretch past the five-minute mark on "Eye for a Lie," in a scratchy swipe at blues-rock jamming, what crawls out of the tape-loop bookends nearly runs away from itself. The second side reins in the tempo a bit—"Ride with View and Major" has what one could nearly call orchestration—but that only creates chomp-at-the-bit tension. Finding a clear balance between fist-