Lost in Space

Sun Ra, who claimed to have been born on Saturn, always suggested that 'Space is the Place', William Burroughs declared that 'Man is an artifact designed for space traveI' (though he never made it), but Jon Savage is happy to travel inside his head through music. His new compilation album Jon Savage's Space: Light Years from Home is a peculiar gathering of music, which kicks off with a decidedly earthbound Byrds track before Spirit's 'Space Child' leads us to the Space Disco. There's a lot of crappy funk, cheesy synthesizers and bad disco here, seemingly included because each has 'space' in the title. Even Martin Hannett can only conjure up a rhythmic pulse with some weird sound effects and garbled voices over the top, whilst Tom Recchion's 'Space Ship' sounds like a 1970s' TV theme whilst Devo's track 'Space Junk' simply lives up to the second part of its title.

By the time Hawkwind – inevitably – arrive for track 14 it's a relief to hear something with some muscle in. Savage seems to have gone for moody weak tracks over band's strengths: the Wooden Shjips' track here sounds like a Moody Blues outtake, whilst Biosphere channel Tangerine Dream rather than produce their usual considered and intelligent industrial noise. It's left to Tim Buckley to close the album with his genuinely strange 'Starsailor' song, which is made from layered vocal improvisations. Unfortunately, it's the only place where this album really takes off.

More exciting and unearthly is the Music is a Message from Space album from the Corbett vs Dempsey label, which kicks off with a brief acapella Sun Ra track, before two outstanding guitar improvisations by Raymond Boni – one acoustic, one electric – in response to seeing the Sun Ra Arkestra warming up before a gig. The second piece, 'sun ra river side', is particularly evocative and flows nicely into a solo vibraphone version of two Sun Ra tracks by Jason Adasiewicz, which chimes and echoes in a suitably cosmic manner.

Side two, if you get the vinyl LP, offers a change of mood. Four brief Sun Ra Loops offer cosmic cutups to clear your head and take us to the other end of the musical universe. As we travel we are treated to a noisy Sun Ra cover by Spaceways Inc. + Mu (aka Ken Vandermark) and upon our arrival we find Joe McPhee offering us 'Cosmic Love', a gently soothing and all-embracing saxophone which allows us to gently exit the known solar system.

Or if you prefer you can bathe in the soft light of Rob Mazurek's *Alternate Moon Cycles* (International Anthem), three tracks of what the blurb rightly calls 'organic minimal music', conjured up live by a trio of cornet, organ and bass. 'Waxing Crescent #1' is a gently pulsating drone piece, which seems almost alive as it gently ebbs and flows, whilst '#2' is noisier and busier, with the bass guitar more to the fore, more musical changes and less sustain. The digital-only bonus track, 'The Tree of Life', is more haunting and includes some astounding cornet blowing over the shimmer and pulse of guitar and organ. Sometimes, it seems, less is more; certainly in this case.

Rupert Loydell

(535 words)