

Unofficial Channels:

Tapeworm

Just as there are more and more underground musicians prepared to admit to a hankering after the clunky pop sounds from the late 1970s to the mid-80s, there's also an increased tolerance for consuming music on the clunkiest format of the same period: the audio cassette. Cassette labels are never going to find favour with main street stockists, though, so the medium will remain resolutely under the radar. Inaugurated during 2008, Britain's Tapeworm imprint has been commissioning new work specifically for tapes that are released in barcode-free editions of 250, with simple white covers, several featuring a new illustration by *The Wire* cartoonist Savage Pencil. Inaugurated with *Spool* by Philip Jeck, featuring the turntablist on solo bass, the Tapeworm has so far disgorged around a dozen artefacts, available from its own website and from the Touch HQ. It's a wide range of material – recalling, in fact, the output of the Touch label itself in the early days – that has so far included spoken word by Jean Baudrillard and Derek Jarman, sonic art by Stephen O'Malley and Simon Fisher Turner, and tempestuous avant blat from The Van Patterson Quartet and Savage Pencil & Sharon Gal's duo Meltaot.

"The idea is to showcase work created specifically for a fantastic format," says a spokesman for the anonymous Tapeworm collective, "from artists who have thought about the format and what formatting means in this era, and to present these audio pieces in harmoniously designed cases featuring illustrations by people we also admire." For the Tapeworm crew, the attraction of the cassette is its "non-digital awkwardness; the clunk; the effort required of the listener, an enforcement of A versus B; listening to music as a sequence; size and dimensions; its memory..." And those with longer memories will recall the crucial role the cassette formerly played in the dissemination of an experimental music culture, in the decade immediately preceding the advent of the internet. For years, a huge international postal tape network existed quite outside of recognised delivery channels, keeping such uncompromising music alive among a devoted hardcore of listeners and composers. Tapeworm have come up with a boutique version, celebrating a demanding medium as the perfect carrier of challenging audio.

Hot on the heels of *Haven't I Seen You Before* by Macro-Rec's Techno conceptualist Stefan Goldmann and Lasse Marhaug & Jon Wesseltoft's Tongues Of Mt Meru duo, this month sees the release of Autodigest's *A Compressed History Of Every Bootleg Ever Recorded*, and Swedish artist Leif Elggren's *All Animals Are Saints*, a speech tape made last year. As the Worm puts it: "Hiss to the fore, baby!" □ tapeworm.org.uk

Rob Young