

Carl Stone
Stolen Car

Unseen Worlds DL

Stolen Car is an anagram of Stone's name, and his latest album is full of compositions scavenged from the spoils of ram-raiding the pop charts. It's not quite a straightforward smash and grab followed by a plunderphonic trip to the chop shop. "I like to hijack the surface values of commercial music and repurpose them to offer a newer, different meaning, via irony and subversion," Stone says. But he doesn't operate in the mode of pranksters like Negativland, whose collages mulch through a lifetime's worth of parasitic earworm jingles and other commercial audio brainrot. Or the surreal audio and video collages of Vicki Bennett aka People Like Us, who weaves key images from classic films with contrasting AM radio ballads into dream-logic narratives at the speed of twitching eyeballs in REM sleep. Bennett composes her works with a complicated origami apparatus that looks like a cross between an Elizabethan ruff and a Klein bottle, where she maps each transition between samples on one of its many folds.

Instead, Stone zooms in to the nanoscale, focusing on a grain of a production tic, a vocal affectation, a fraction of a drum pattern, space in a bassline. He cuts samples to the threshold of recognisability – the smallest possible functional units – and then goes to town layering them, looping them through increasingly incremental time delays, linking up fragments through a series of patches that warp and interact to further distort and disorientate. Where Bennett's craft unfolds on paper, Stone's compositions are more like shredded currency – something about the colour and texture of the shreds gives away its former incarnation, but lord help anyone trying to Sellotape them together to buy a coffee.

The resulting hyperbolic sounds – process driven as they are – find kinship with the maximalist

psychedelic pyrotechnics and neon deconstructions of smooth jazz and death metal of the Hausu Mountain roster. The rubberised "Auburn" bounces around gasps and aaahs that become a long gargling howl synced with a telephone busy signal pulse – that then turns into a skipping tune punctuated by metal guitar, and builds into extraterrestrial zips and, I don't know, the riff from "Big Country"? "Huanchaco" sounds like an 808 scrambling towards frantic sentience while layers of robozoo zips and squeals get into the action. "Bojuk", originally sampling an Ariana Grande tune, could be a dispatch from the factory floor co-produced by print machinery recordist Jonáš Gruska.

Cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter spent time in the 1980s developing computer programs that could solve anagram jumble puzzles: it's a game that involves stripping semantic meaning from words as they split into letter units, then recombining the letters into other recognisable words. The process involves several steps between different levels of cognition. Finding meaning in – or applying meaning to – anagrams is another level of meta, and something Hofstadter's Jumbler couldn't do, but it's a preoccupation of human anagram enthusiasts. Anu Garg's Internet Anagram Server has a title page that animates to spell out "I, Rearrangement Servant". Garg says, "All the life's wisdom can be found in anagrams. Anagrams never lie." Stone is blessed with a name full of some of the most useful consonants in the English language, and enough vowels to make them flip into gymnastic configurations: Garg's site gives him 426 options, and it's clear why he chose to call this album *Stolen Car* rather than *Clear Snort* or *Rectal Son*.

In an interview with Catherine Sinow of *Arts Technica*, Stone says of his compositional process, "It has a semblance of semantic meaning, but it's strange." While it's possible to recognise the samples Stone uses as his substrate, and there's pleasure in

trying to puzzle them out, there's as much pleasure in trying to make sense of the new juxtapositions – or just attuning to their kinetic physicality. The necrotic, zombie-voiced "Ganci" and sharp, stuttery "Figli" are built from the same track – I have no idea what it is – but it's exciting how the difference in tone is as stark as that between Oneohtrix Point Never's "Nobody Here" and "Sticky Drama". I hear similarities between the timbre of the gasps of "Auburn" and the yodelly vocal patchwork of "The Jugged Hare"; are they both rendered from the same Mitski track? And how much of that is subliminally primed by the title of "Auburn" being so semantically close to Mitski's "Strawberry Blond"? Stone's titles aren't meant to describe tracks – they're all taken from a list of his favourite restaurants, many of which are known for their spicy Asian cuisine. But even if they're chosen at random from a spreadsheet, the source is one of sensual, embodied pleasure. Through some perverse physical entrainment, Stone's glitches become earworms; "Au Jus", the manic anagram of "Bojuk", is a catcher toetapper than its source material.

The genius of Stone's reconfigurations is where process crashes into play. Why else would listeners spend hours of detective work brute-forcing lyric search sites and toggling through endless YouTube clips to find connections, match textures, a hiccup, a microsecond of a drum pad – when most of it will just be guesswork and pareidolia? I hear splinters of the splashy drums of Siouxsie & The Banshees' "Kiss Them For Me" in "Pasjoli", even though the vocal sample of the latter sounds male and hip-hop – and "Saaris" sounds like a loop of Juice Newton's "Angel Of The Morning" drowned in reverb and haunted by Roky Erikson's ghost. Is Stone bookending an album with two songs that can be read as expert tessellations of drivetime kiss-offs, or something else entirely? Who the hell knows? But I salute the Note Rasc'l who keeps us guessing. □

Slant Core: Carl Stone



In a world heaped and cluttered with recycled pop trash, US composer and collagist **Carl Stone** is the unreal deal. By **Emily Bick**

Samantha Gore