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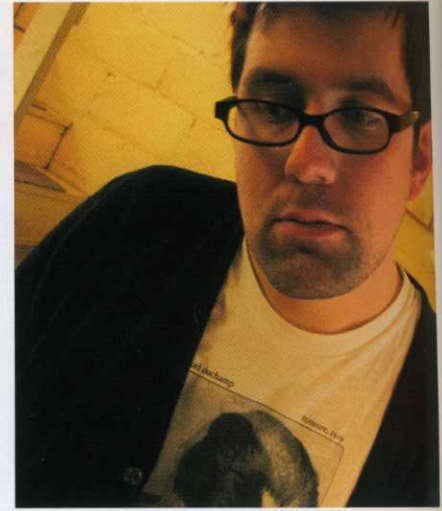
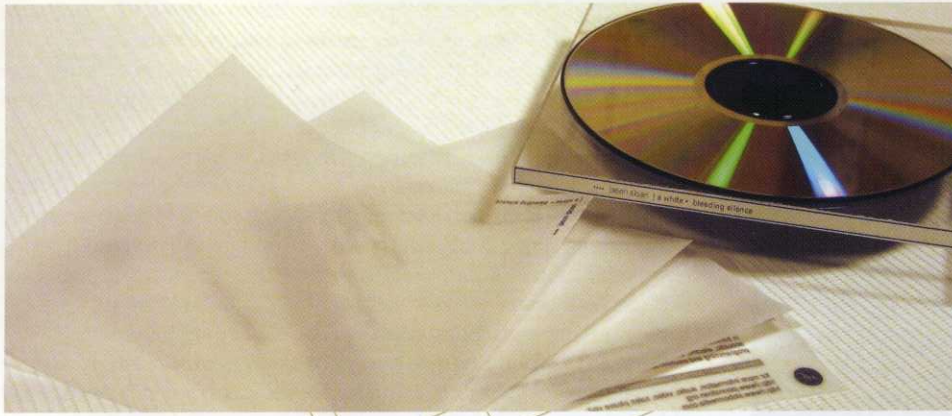
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MUSIC ELECTRONIC AND OTHERWISE

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Jason Sloan

QUIET STORM

THE HONEY COVERS HIS ENTIRE FACE AND GOES UP his nose. And then he just stands limply. Facing the audience, he is completely unable to see anything. Suddenly, a good samaritan emerges from the seats and, in an act of unscripted audience participation, assists multimedia artist Jason Sloan off the stage at Baltimore's The Whole Gallery.

His deeply unnerving performance art piece, *Ofhoneywrapbleedinside*, comes to a climactic end. Yet, sitting here watching a video of this work, it feels more like a kind of beginning, as if we the audience have been brought to a deeply personal place that the artist wants to share with us. Sloan's performance seems like he is trying to communicate something so trapped within himself that words alone simply won't suffice. His guitar- and field-recording-produced soundscapes have a similar effect on an audience. "Tactility is very important to me," Sloan says while pondering a question about how he creates the beautifully minimalist atmospheric sounds and the equally lovely handcrafted packaging for his work. "I want my craft, whether visual, performance, or sound, to touch the listener in an unforced trickle."

A "touching, unforced trickle" of consistently soothing sounds is precisely how to characterize Sloan's previous musings, *The Space Between Beginnings* and *Still* (both released on his and longtime creative-partner-in-crime Matt Borghi's Slo Bor Media), meeting with high praise from the press and landing Sloan a coveted appearance on Chuck Van Zyl's radio show *Star's End*. "As a longtime fan, playing live on *Star's End*, a show that's been around for nearly three decades, was very cool for me," he says. A self-described "music snob," Sloan possesses a well-traveled ear: he has clearly internalized the delicate ambience of Steve Roach's *Structures from Silence* and *Quiet*

Music, as well as the warmth of much of Thom Brennan's oeuvre. But as in his performance art, there seems to be something a bit darker going on behind the shadows, something straining to be felt: he yearns to impact the listener in a wholly natural, unintrusive way. "I am not a musician," he says. "These sounds come about in a very organic process." Having heard the phrase "organic process" from artists so many times, however, is too easy—this incites further probing, such as, fundamentally, where does such haunting yearning come from? He pauses and then says, "From my life. Various tragedies and such have given me a deeper appreciation of what many in the world call "God." Is the spectre of "new age" rearing its ugly head? Not in the slightest—there's no pat religious agenda at work here. On the contrary, Sloan insists, "The art I create is my own spiritual practice for simply going deeper into the world."

On his latest opus, *A White Bleeding Silence*, Sloan seems to have pushed himself even further sonically. "Playing live all over the country, being surrounded by what Matt and I call "the wall of sound" really made me want to bring a thicker aural experience to this project." Not to mention a "thicker" material presentation for the work as well. "Yeah, material presentation is very important to me. I worked as a graphic artist and I feel strongly that the packaging must be done in a serious way. That's why for the first 100 copies of *A White Bleeding Silence* I had a company cut for us thick, beautiful squares of clear perplex to hold the discs, and all of the inserts are printed on translucent vellum." The packaging's overall effect is one of a found object; the blank silver disc behind the plastic looks almost like it is intentionally being "preserved" in its own museum-quality case. And the white vellum sporting the tiny black typeface lends a somber and almost ghostly

patina to the entire presentation. *A White Bleeding Silence* captures what one leading graphic innovator, Designer's Republic's Ian Anderson, describes as the need for CD packaging to be "experienced through time and interaction...[without] seeing everything at once; I don't want to see the end of a film at the same time as the beginning."

Filmic modes are certainly a byproduct of Sloan's operational imperatives—influences range from director Federico Fellini to the more surreal work of America's foremost soft underbelly exposé, David Lynch. Most recently, Sloan has entered the world of visceral theater, probing the visual acuities of legendary French surrealist/absurdist Antonin Artaud. "There is definitely a darker, more organic connotation going on during *A White Bleeding Silence*," he says. "Lately, I have been very affected by Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty*. I want to create a chaotic environment in which the audience is assaulted by all kinds of things happening simultaneously." *AWBS* seems to bridge the gap between Sloan as performance artist and sound sculptor more than ever before. The simultaneous surrender and release of *Ofhoneywrapbleedinside* seems like a blank canvas for the album's opening track, "A Beginning," to inform the resultant palette, with its dense, vibrating feedback engaging an awesome series of warmly filtered, gradual crescendos.

Even at a very high volume, the "wall of sound" that Sloan creates on *A White Bleeding Silence* still soothes. Indeed, one senses that his sounds are driven by the need, whether conscious or unconscious, to create a kind of cathartic effect in the listener. But what is rare about an artist like Sloan is his ability to share "disturbing" albeit intensely personal undercurrents in such an inviting manner. For the experience to be mutually satisfying, "what it comes down to is that I make art for myself first," he says. Ambient elements aside, the rise of Sloan's inner "me" no doubt will rattle those of "us" in the years ahead.

BEN FLEURY-STEINER