

Noise: NZ/JAPAN

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Perhaps the ultimate modern Japanese psychedelic/noise band is High Rise, a trio of Narita Munehiro (guitar) Nanjo Asahito (bass) and frequently-changing drummers. Psychedelic Speed Freaks was the original name of this band and the title of their first album. Psychedelic Speed Freaks—it aptly sums them up.

Their first album, the first release on the PSF label (the pre-eminent Japanese alternative label, named for the band) has to be the heaviest release from a very fuzzed-out unit, even given it's muddy lo-fi sound. Song titles like 'Induced Depression' 'Stone Addict' and 'Take a Trip'—allegedly cynical swipes at drug culture—barely hint at the music within. Here, like all the releases that follow, Narita's swathes of sublime distorto-guitar heaviness cut through Nanjo's roving, psychedelic bass lines and the driving pound of the drummer. While a product of the 70s/80s Tokyo punk scene, this first effort has more in common with the various noise groups active in Japan at the time than later High Rise releases, and it's on the second album that the band clearly define their future sound/style. *High Rise 2* was originally released in 1986, then reissued in CD form in 1993, digitally remastered with a couple of extra tracks. Beyond the initial pummeling sonic impact is a near-perfect balance of speed, intensity, and identifiable song-form defining this as their classic release and a cornerstone of any self-respecting Japanese psych rock collection.

Later material pushes the distortion and heaviness deeper into the red, peaking with releases like *Durophet*, live recordings from France on Fractal Records where the production renders the audience response nearly as extreme as the music, a claustrophobic blur of compressed sound; or *Speed Free Sonic* on UK label Paratactile, recordings from 1994 mastered incredibly loud for the ultimate High Rise experience—perhaps this is what Opprobrium was referring to when it rated High Rise as *some kind of peak in the post-psych idiot rock underground*.

The last-known studio installment from High Rise is *Desperado*, and it may be their best-sounding release, too. There's a few changes to the usual routine—obviously the super-fast riffing and monster pound dominates but there's a new spaciousness here with the band in an extended looser mode running to “jazz” stylings on the track *effing*. This came out in 1998. Since then there has been a 2001 PSF live release *Psychobomb*, a document of the band's 2000 US tour, and *Destination*, a compilation with a couple of previously-unreleased tracks (2002, Tokuma).

While most of the PSF High Rise releases are still in print, the Squealer label has reissued a number of them on CD and LP, maximising accessibility for those outside Japan. To keep up to date with what's happening with the group, visit the [High Rise Official Homepage](#)

To get a good understanding of High Rise it's important to look to some of their influences. As well as the oft-cited Blue Cheer inspiration two groups from the Minor scene, Gaseneta and Kadotani Michio, are both acknowledged as being influential by High Rise. Gaseneta were a “punk” outfit from the late part of the 1970s. They have a CD out on PSF, perhaps their only existing release, called *Sooner or Later*. Considering the dismal state of a lot of Japanese punk this is great, nowhere near the sheer white-out of High Rise, et al, but kind of admirable falling-apart primitivism... basically the same song done over and over at varying degrees of intensity, with VERY ferocious vocals. Whether or not you want to hear this probably depends on your tolerance for punk/noise mayhem; but an important band in terms of their purported influence none the less. Kadotani Michio—Japan's only true original punk in the words of Nanjo—is cited as another important figure from these times, he died young without leaving any official recordings but there's a posthumous PSF CD *Rotting Telepathies* available documenting his abstract, chaotic punk/rock. It's patchy, but between the frenetic drum machines and distortion (think early Cabaret Voltaire,) VU-ish guitar and general mayhem there's a agreeably messed-up aura.

Other High Rise related goods include Mainliner, a group formed by Nanjo and described by him as “...a more condensed version of the High Rise aesthetic.” You can hear this “aesthetic” on the Mainliner *Mellow Out* album. Don't let the bozo title fool you, stick with the “more condensed” concept. This 1995 release is one of the pinnacles of the Japanese psych/noise scene, an absolutely excessive 35 minutes of wailing sonic obliteration. *Mellow Out* was originally released by Charnel Music, went out of print, and has been reissued as a CD and LP by Riot Season. The band's second release, also on the Charnel label, *Mainliner Sonic* is 30 minutes of ultra-distorted, speaker-popping density, definitely “condensed” just like a black hole. And quite possibly the best rock album of 1997. There's an LP out there too, *Psychedelic Polyhedron* on the above-mentioned Fractal label. The name's the same, members are the same, but otherwise you'd never guess it was Mainliner...they're in full freaked-out mode here and the long gushes of

backwards-looking forwards-moving propulsion have pretty much nothing in common with the CDs. Except that they're all totally excessive. Just so you know what to expect.

Mainliner members Nanjo and guitarist Kawabata Makoto appear with Ruins drummer Yoshida Tatsuya as Musica Transonic (although *Mainliner Sonic* sees the drummer from *Mellow Out* Koizumi Hajime replaced by Yoshida; thus Mainliner=Music Transonica, member-wise at least) with a number of releases on PSF. Hard to recommend any one over the others, all have more of that totally distorted psychedelic heaviness we've all come to adore, this time delivered via "improv" stylings (though Nanjo claims Musica Transonica is more composed than High Rise, the former composing as they play.) And you could probably do with the Musica Transonic/Haino Keiji collaboration *Incubation*. Which when you think about it is a kind of weird mix. But they made it work. Musica Transonic were summed up by someone somewhere as: "Totally over the top, utterly stupid, hugely inventive, loud and obnoxious—in other words, just what you need." That kind of describes the whole High Rise/Mainliner/Musica Transonic axis...and I admit, listening to the different bands it can be hard to know where one lets up and the next implodes. Let's just say that Musica Transonic go for slightly more "avant" arrangements than the others, more so with each successive release, realising new peaks of white noise intensity. High Rise delight in mutating HM and punk concepts into what feels like one joyously long, blurred mess while Mainliner suck all of this into a tightly compressed howling buzz-ball of energy.

The connections stretch on, with Nanjo and Kawabata turning up in Toho Sara. While a collaboration between the two the process of recording for their two PSF CDs involved Kawabata recording most of the instruments and composing the tracks. The first self-titled CD was then mixed and overdubbed by Kawabata and Nanjo a month after recording. Their second release, 1999s *Mei Jou Tan Sho* was mixed and overdubbed by Nanjo and Mido Mineko four years after Kawabata had done the recording. Totally different in sound from any of the above units, the music here is describable as "Japanese Underground Shamanistic Avant-Garde." This is acoustic dronings and scrapings on a different plane to the monster psych of Mainliner or Musica Transonic; to quote Nanjo "What we're aiming for with Toho Sara is to use acoustic instruments, but use them in a way which people brought up in the age of electricity will find exciting." *Mei Jou Tan Sho* is my pick for the best of the two though it's a close call.

Another desirable release here is the Seventh Seal LP on Acme Records, a UK-based label (home of British psychedelic revisionists Sun Dial who have some good music out too.) Seventh Seal is the old Mainliner line-up, if I've got my names correct, this time with a couple of additions: Mineko Itakura and Nobuko Emi. Head for the sun...this is real exotic trippery and yet another move in what seems to be a search for the ultimate cosmic "vibe" from these people. They're getting kind of close here with an album of floating, extended tunes but mind the hippy excess. This Seventh Seal line-up also seem to have been at least one incarnation of Ohkami no Jikan, though whether it's the same one as on their one CD *Mort Nuit* (on Fractal) is unknown. The CD liner notes state: "As a psychedelic group that explores all music, from heavy, dark sounds to jazz, contemporary and experimental, Ohkami no Jikan occupies an important position in the Japanese underground scene". Right. *Mort Nuit* is good though, heavy minimalism spread over one long track and two shorter ones.

For more information about most the above, and a pretty comprehensive look at one part of the Tokyo Scene, read the excellent Nanjo Asahito interview in vol. 3 of *Opprobrium* (from where some of the above quotes were stolen.) This is followed up in vol. 4 as High Rise guitarist Narita Munehiro fills in the gaps about High Rise and the Tokyo underground. Nanjo had his own label, La Musica Records where he released a lot of High Rise, Mainliner, Musica Transonic, and a whole lot more, with at one stage close to 200 titles listed, though how many were actually "available" was never really clear. The mother of all High Rise releases was released by La Musica, a 10 CD-R boxset of old and new unreleased material, apparently limited to something like 100 copies and a "celebration" of 15 years of music making. More box sets are or were available—all 10 CD-R collections and all except for the last Musica Transonic set, limited. *La Musica Box I* consists of various La Musica artists—2 CD-Rs each from High Rise, Musica Transonic, Okami no Jikan, Mainliner and Toho Sara. Then there's the *La Musica Box II*, avant-garde bands including Group Musica, Maudite Nuit, Toho Sara, Uchu Kamado and more. The fourth set features *Psychedelic Atmosphere Beatnik* groups including Musica Transonic, Mainliner, Acid Mothers Temple, Menzaifu, Toho Sara; live recordings. Then we have *Steal Underground Space* recordings sourced from a variety of locations of Mystic Sensorium, Arcanum, High Rise and more. *La Musica Box III* sounded interesting; earlier psych groups like Holy Angels, Menzaifu, Jiyu Minken, Buzoku, etc). Finally there's the Musica Transonic 5th anniversary collection made up of recordings from 1994-1999. I'm not sure if any of these are still available, or even if La Musica still exists, I'd say the likelihood is that it's no more. The one place you might be able to find La Musica items is at the Modern Music shop in Tokyo. If anyone feels an urge to try and track down Nanjo/La Musica, you might want to try via his dodgy video sales enterprise. Otherwise the only contact I know of is a postal address.

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