

Net.Labels :: *Online Music Feature*

Michael Upton offers an exclusive look into the world of [Net.Labels](#) --offering advice on how to find those hidden gems on the net along with *several* recommendations (*by sound or mood*) and some favorite releases for you to investigate.

[Michael Upton](#), Contributor

net.labels feature
by: michael upton

(02.02.05) **Net.Labels are undoubtedly a great concept: as a label, your costs are low; as an artist, finished material gets published quickly alongside other like-minded souls**, where people are more likely to find it; and as a listener you've got the opportunity to get

great music for no more than the cost of your internet connection!

Another positive aspect for the listener is that net labels are a lot less hit-and-miss than vainly digging through individual artists' sites. Finding music by people you have never heard of is easy enough, but finding something you like can be a lot harder. In this regard, one of the benefits of a label of any kind is it involves some kind of editorial stance on the part of whoever runs the label. As with a conventional label that releases CDs or vinyl you will undoubtedly come across entire stables that are not to your taste at all, but conversely you may find a net label where you are at least interested in every release.

In practice there is one huge stumbling block to net labels' popularity and it is a simple one. Where do you start? The number of net labels out there borders on the absurd. Do you have the time to download everything on the off chance it might be appealing? Sturgeon's Law suggest that finding anything you like is going to be a frustrating endeavor. Even trying to hunt around on key words by genre can be a nightmare, particularly for those of us who are monolingual English speakers. We can't expect the copy on every site from Belgium, Portugal or Japan to be phrased the way we expect.

Trying to get my head around what is actually out there, I have spent a month or two downloading well over 20 giga-bytes of music from net labels. Even now I am not sure if I have done more than scratch the surface. If I were to write up this article in a couple of months I might have a completely different impression of what's good and what's not, not just because of what I have yet to download but what I have yet to take in. I have listened to everything I've downloaded at least once, though, so let's get on with it!

I have broken this overview into three parts, which I hope will give you some starting points for finding music you like.

1. Finding net labels
2. Recommendations of net labels by sound or mood
3. Some favourite releases (so far!)

1. Finding net labels

A lot of net labels operate with the support of [scene.org](#) and the [Internet Archive](#). Both sites host all kinds of files and material, so this may not be such an easy way to browse. The fastest way to dip into scene.org directly is through the [forum](#) where net label announcements are posted. The main net label page at the Internet Archive has a message board as well, below a complete list of their hosted labels with descriptions of each. Under each label there are also user reviews of different releases and so on.

Web magazine [Phlow](#) hosts the [Net Label Catalogue](#) which has a large list of labels, which can be browsed by genre. I found the

labels' ideas of what genre they fitted into were often at odds with my own, but nonetheless, if you want a big list of sites, this is the largest I found.

Elektrobong maintains another [database of net labels](#), as well as having an easy to view [news page](#) outlining new releases from around the world with detailed write ups.

The list of links provided by [Rowolo](#) is a little more idiosyncratic, as they have taken on a policy of only putting up links to music they like. One of the things I appreciate about this site is the key to genres included in the labels list. Easy to browse.

The net label [Subsource](#) streams mixes which are often exclusively net audio, with comprehensive track lists and credits. So if you like net radio this is a great option for dipping your toes into a variety of artists and labels. The label and their mixes tend towards the ambient end of things, but within that general area there is still a raft of material on offer, ranging from smooth synth based IDM with soft beats, through slightly abrasive beatless material, to processed environmental recordings.

There is also a [Yahoo group](#) where labels publicize their new releases and a [free audio Yahoo group](#) where both message archives are publicly accessible.

Once you have got started check out any links you can find. Your new favorite net label may well point you to other labels that will suit your tastes. Likewise, a fair number of artists have releases with more than one net label, so checking out the artists' pages can be a good way to discover material by like-minded artists.

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2. Recommendations of net labels by sound or mood

You may just be looking for a **wide range of electronic listening music** as a starter. Somewhere you can browse through and hear a whole lot of different sounds. [Observatory Online](#) has heaps of great EP releases, with a bit of a focus on more mellow sounds, but still very varied and often a little edgy. [Interdisco](#) also has a wide range of worthwhile tracks, but with more than a couple of four-to-the-floor EPs, including something by Murcof collaborator Fax. The standard and breadth of music published by [Autoplate](#) is quite remarkable. Their compilations are a good way to get a feel for what is available through the label. A wide range of what can be classed as **IDM**, as well as **ambient**, **microsound** and music which mixes **acoustic instruments with electronic processing**.

There is a lot of what I think is called **melodic IDM** out there. You know the drill: soft drum machine rhythms that sometimes go a little crunchy but are never angry, lush synth chords, chiming melodies, maybe a little acoustic guitar or piano here and there. I must admit it's not my favorite kind of music, but I figure a lot of Igloo's readers live and breathe the stuff, so it would be remiss not to give some pointers. By all accounts, the undisputed champions in this arena are [Monotonik](#), [Sutemos](#), and [Kahvi](#). Monotonik tends towards EPs, Sutemos towards LPs and Kahvi towards one or two tracks per release. The two Sutemos **Invisible Toys** compilations have a good range of artists, most of whom are old hands to the net label game. In fact a few of the artists are on all three of these labels, from memory.

Even more popular than melodic IDM among net labels is **minimal techno**, particularly the dubby variety of post-Chain Reaction sounds. The sheer volume of material available in this one genre is exhausting. My tastes tend towards the softer tracks, but if you like something driving try the Stadt releases on the interesting split label [Stadtgruen](#). [Thinnerism](#) has a huge catalogue of quality dubbed-out stuff, but the relatively new [Filtro](#) has some even better releases which span **minimal techno**, **microhouse** and **ambient**. [Epsilon Lab](#) is another good contender, sometimes tending more towards the bounce and click of **microhouse** tracks as well.

[Textone](#) also releases **minimal techno**, but my favourite releases there were some great **microhouse** sounds similar to what you

might find on labels like Perlon, Playhouse and Force Tracks. They also have a great release by Kero, who makes the kind of kinky **electro** associated with artists such as Two Lone Swordsmen.

If you like the idea of **deep electronic dub** without the doof doof beats, I would recommend a couple of small labels. [Monohm](#) has some beautiful music, particularly from the act that shares the label's name, and is well worth checking out. [Kyoto](#) only has three releases up at the time of writing, but **Kyoto 3** and **4** are excellent EPs containing tracks perhaps a little too similar to Rhythm & Sound. Still, if you like that sound, why pass up on getting some for free? **Kyoto 2** is more Chain Reaction style techno, a little like older Porter Ricks.

It's a little harder to recommend a label as a whole for **post rock**, **folktronica** and what have you. I'm thinking here of music based around the electronic processing of acoustic instruments. There is certainly [Starving But Happy!](#), which bills itself as "The Ambient & Indietronic Music Netlabel", but there aren't actually many releases there. [Autres Directions In Music](#) is my suggestion for your first port of call. They have some fantastic releases with beats and acoustic guitar and so on, in the territory of artists like Minotaur Shock and Four Tet, as well as a superb half hour slow building piece by Harpages that might be at home on somewhere like Kranky or Constellation. [Race Will Begin](#) offers a selection of virtual 7"s, including a bunch of mutant electronic pop songs, net audio stalwart Bauri remixing a slow indie song, and a twisted electro cover of Kelis's "Milkshake!" If you are looking for something **more free and improvised sounding** then try [Komplott](#). Their releases are largely beatless, and although a lot are largely electronic quite a few mix in other instrumentation. Jim O'Rourke's electronic work or the more improvisational work Fennesz has done (eg. his collaboration with Polwechsl) are good guideposts for what to expect.

Following on from labels like Komplott, there is a surprising amount of **microsound**, **electro-acoustic** and what gets called **dark ambient** music available on the web. As with the melodic IDM, this is an area of only passing interest to me, so I'm not sure what to recommend in particular. From the four or five labels I checked out [tiln](#) seemed to be the most varied and interesting.

If you are at all interested in **hip-hop**, **broken beats**, or **jazz influenced dance** sounds the best label by a mile is [Tokyo Dawn Records](#). They have expanded into other formats, but there is a lot of music there for free, including some nice mixes which include tracks otherwise unavailable online.

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3. Some favourite releases (so far!)

Anders Dahl :: **Kärrsilja, flockblomstriga 2** ([Komplott](#))



:: Anders certainly deserves an award for the most transparent track names - "Kärrsilja — Metal Bowls, Electronics, Bouzouki," "Kärrsilja — Electronics, Piano, Guitar" and "Kärrsilja — Sinewave, Bottles, Guitar, Harmonica." The names give you an instant entry point to what the artist is up to. Anders leaves a lot of space in the material and despite the fact that each of

the layers is improvised by himself it is easy enough to imagine a quirky little ensemble were playing all of this live.

Blaktronics :: **P2P Pressure** ([Tokyo Dawn Records](#))



:: This release is accurately described on the site as "minimal'n'dry techno-inspired superfunk". The four tracks are downtempo, swaggering rhythms with punchy synths adding flavour and fun. I would have tended to consider it instrumental hip-hop, but there is certainly that Detroit feel in the music. I was reminded of artists such as

Dabrye and Anthony "Shake" Shakir.

Deework :: **Happy Meal** ([Bedroom Research](#))



:: Now this is my idea of melodic IDM! Strange textures and creative beats are mixed with a lot of melodic and harmonic variation. The mood is light and often

energetic, buoyed up by the shifting rhythms. While there are heaps of digital effects throughout they are never a substitute for great compositions. The results sit somewhere between the good old days of early Plaid and the perverted pop sensibilities of Mouse on Mars. My favorite is the sedate "Watersine." The other two Deework albums on Bedroom Research are much more moody and not so much to my taste.

Lomov :: **Free Port** ([StadtGruen](#))



:: The StadtGruen site is worth a look just for the beautiful design, but if you enjoy contemporary ambient sounds then it would be a travesty to not check out Lomov's

releases. While he has releases on other labels, it is **Free Port** that grabbed me most. Aesthetically, the tracks have some similarities with SND - those tiny tinks and blips that sneak around the upper range of your hearing; the rounded, dry bass sounds - but many of the compositions are much less focused on rhythm and overall Lomov shows a wider stylistic range. The particularly yummy "Charger" is reminiscent of Electric Birds with its record crackle percussion and somber echoing chords.

Lufth :: **Tendenzen EP** ([Thinner](#))



:: Coming across an EP this distinctive is truly refreshing, when so much digital dub sounds interchangeable. The sounds used here are an inviting mix of sampled piano, bright synths and dusty noise, assembled into slowly shifting patterns. The rich quality of the textures and slightly off-kilter rhythms reminded me a little of the fantastic Kompakt producer Dettinger, but

this music is truly Lufth's own. While he also has many releases on Thinner as Digitalverein I must confess that these tracks, where he ditches the doof doof of minimal techno, are far and away my favourites. If you like this EP a good follow-up is the **Silent Season Dub** album, which collects down tempo tracks by most of the main Thinner contributors.

Manrico Montero / Various :: **Noches De Verano + Remixes** ([Filtro](#))



:: This album is intriguing enough for the rare opportunity to check out 14 different Mexican electronic artists, but as it turns out the music presented here is excellent in and of themselves. The starting point is a contemporary ambient affair with some soft percussion. The remixes take in the whole gamut of contemporary electronics - glitchy IDM, noisy drones, microhouse, and some acoustic guitar in there somewhere - but most importantly the vast majority of them

have their own individual character rather than just sounding like tame genre workouts. The fact you have 14 takes on one track does get a bit much, but part of the joy of the digital file approach to listening is it's so easy to listen to one or two tracks at a time or shuffle them up among everything else you've downloaded.

Phoebus :: **Peri Sable EP** ([Test Tube](#))



:: The comment on the Test Tube label site says all that needs to be said about these two lengthy tracks: "An ambient work along the lines of those of Akira Rabelais, Rafael Toral and other minimalistic guitar players. Highly recommended."

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Links Directory (*..in order of appearance*) ::

- [Scene.org](#)
- [Archive.org Internet Archive](#)
- [Scene.org Forum](#)
- [Phlow](#)
- [Elektrobong Database of net labels](#)
- [Rowolo](#)
- [Subsource](#)
- [Yahoo Net Label group](#)
- [Yahoo Net Audio group](#)
- [Observatory Online](#)
- [Interdisco](#)
- [Autoplate](#)
- [Monotonik](#)
- [Sutemos](#)
- [Stadtgruen](#)
- [Kahvi](#)
- [Thinnerism](#)
- [Filtro](#)
- [Epsilon Lab](#)
- [Textone](#)
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- [Kyoto](#)
- [Starving But Happy](#)
- [Autres Directions In Music](#)
- [Race Will Begin](#)
- [Komplott](#)
- [TiIn](#)
- [Tokyo Dawn Records](#)
- [Bedroom Research](#)
- [Test Tube](#)

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