

LAWQ
CLASSICS



JON ØIVIND NESS
POPPING
CIKADA



POPULISM

Popping is a contemporary musical fable, a story of hopelessness and salvation, and an artistic political statement. The piece is also a 60-minute conceptual protest against conceptualism—a paradox the composer begrudgingly accepts. Above all, it is a 24-movement peep show into Jon Øivind's myriad of pop-culture references.

In the first part, we are introduced to popular music as it may possibly manifest itself in a distant future. Genre boundaries have been erased, and any combination is possible in an aesthetic glass bead game. Music has transmuted into a pluralistic set of v, where individual components can be drawn like

playing cards and placed next to, underneath or on top of each other. What is presented here is an idea of the future's musical heritage—fragmented and confusing, though not necessarily dystopian. Perhaps even quite the opposite. Among the inspirations here is the film *Blade Runner* (1982), which features: *a kind of mix of electronic pop and Arabic music, a genre that more or less exists today. Granted, this style of music may already have existed in 1982, but one of the most fascinating things about Blade Runner is its ability to create a believable image of how a future culture might appear, with "impure" mixes of high and low, all possible ethnicities, new wave,*

high-level technology with ancient traditions, all existing together simultaneously. (J. Ø. Ness)

Another important influence here is art rock group The Residents' album *The Tunes of Two Cities* (1981), which describes a future world where humanity is split into two cultures: the moles, who live underground and play dark, grim music, and the chubs, who live cheerfully on the surface accompanied by rickety, mutated cocktail jazz. A nod to this cult classic appears in movement 9, *Microtonal bitonal pentatonal twelve-tone homesick blues*. Jon Øivind also refers to Brian Eno and David Byrne's album *My Life*

in the Bush of Ghosts, a blend of electronic funk and pop, recordings of American radio preachers, and a wealth of various "ethnic" musical styles. It should come as no surprise that *Popping* draws its inspiration from pop culture, although the title eventually takes on a rather brutal double meaning.

The dystopian element emerges midway through the work, when the evil wizard Harry Lemen (a rodent) takes the music prisoner and puts it in chains. Lemen articulates his artistic vision through no less than five Hitlerian speeches, with the repetition emphasising the rigidity of his ideology. The piece teeters on the edge of the over-



obvious, though it seems likely the composer is fully aware of this: the bottleneck created by these constant repetitions, interspersed with catatonically depressed versions of evergreens such as Pink Floyd's *Comfortably Numb* and Diana Ross's *Upside Down*, renders the appearance of the ghost of Karol Szymanowski's in the 23rd movement a genuine relief. The ghost "pops" out of Lemen's eyes—with two pizzicato notes echoed here—and then abuses him mostunspeakably. In the Popping universe, this is actually a happy ending as the music is now free, and the whole thing concludes with a joyful little hymn.

Popping has 25 movements, divided into two parts: before and after the arrival of Lemen. The episodic structure of the

work makes the job of the liner notes writer considerably easier. It becomes both logical and convenient to describe the movements in sequence, almost as if it were a PowerPoint presentation. Some of the titles of the movements carry a specific meaning, while others came about on a whim. The second part is programmatic and self-explanatory, while the first part is more of a hodgepodge—a kind of diorama over an imagined cultural state. For the sake of clarity (or otherwise), here is a summary:

1. Kurt and Conlon sitting in a tree—Kurt Weill converses with the eccentric composer and purveyor of complexity Conlon Nancarrow.

2. Yusuf—a combination of the dream pop duo Cocteau Twins and elements of Arabic folk music.

This is one of several movements inspired by Middle Eastern music, placing the piece in its geopolitical context—a period marked by the Syrian civil war and refugee crisis. The movement premiered as a MIDI file during a benefit concert for the Norwegian asylum seeker Yusuf, who had fled from Hemsedal Asylum Center before he was to be deported to Afghanistan in 2017.

3. Tex Avery's Teeth—a visual association between big wide cartoon-like grins and the xylophone's *white* keys.

4. Fifth Weal—a play on words between *wheel* and *weal*—a synonym for *bruise*—which, according to the composer, need not be afforded any deeper meaning.

5. Iffy jazz—jazz that doesn't want to be played (and Iggy Pop's cousin?).

6. The ethereal lab's puppy—the composer has zero recollection of what this could possibly mean.

7. Arab winter—a continuation of the Middle Eastern theme, and a play on words with *Indian summer*. Darkness and gloom as the sun shines.

8. Is it sty or is it goo?—a play on The Clash's hit *Should I Stay or Should I Go*.

9. Microtonal bitonal pentatonal twelve-tone homesick blues—a playful nod to Bob Dylan's *Subterranean Homesick Blues* as well as The Residents, this movement is a layout of Ness's

tonal system. Curious listeners may want to note down the following keywords: modulating pentatonics, quarter tones, and open dominant relationships.

10. Chronic jazz hands disorder
—a diagnosis likely more entertaining for the outside world than for the unfortunate sufferer.

11. Oggy-pip—another relative of Iggy Pop.

12. Shit-faced on high heels—according to the composer, a musical picture of Cruella De Vil + alcohol.



In part two, we encounter the evil Harry Lemen and from this point on we follow a chronological narrative:

13. Harry Lemen appears and pulls the music down into the dark.

14. First dictatorial speech

15. A long time passes

16. Second dictatorial speech

17. Spastically writhing Dionne Warwick—In the Land of Make Believe

18. Third dictatorial speech

19. Lobotomized Pink Floyd—Comfortably Numb, guitar solo

20. Fourth dictatorial speech

21. Depressed Diana Ross

—Upside Down

22. Fifth dictatorial speech, then Harry Lemen falls asleep

23. Karol Szymanowski's ghost enters in the appearance of his second string quartet and floats around inside the prison. The ghost finds Harry Lemen, pops out his eyes (Blade Runner-style!), and abuses him.

24. The music is released, makes a run for it, and is finally free.

25. Short hymn

When asked why Szymanowski is cast as deus ex machina and the saviour of music, Jon Øivind replies that he had for a long time wanted to write a string quartet with extensive use of parallel octaves, modelled on Szymanowski's *String Quartet No. 2, Op. 56*. It seemed

like the right place to put it in here, not least because Szymanowski makes "really good music."

Popping is also an exercise in trusting *duration* as a device. The glacial quarter-tone glissando in movement 23 is one example, as is the repetition of entire movements—a kind of hyper-exposure of pop music's often formulaic *verse-chorus-verse* structures. In part 1, this is primarily a fabling of how these tropes might appear in a distant future. In part 2, you might wonder if the composer wants to manipulate the listener into the same apathetic trance as the music, the protagonist of the story, finds itself in. We are Jon Øivind's captives, just as the music is Harry Lemen's. Such choices have indeed made *Popping* a much debated piece,



causing disagreement among musicians, audiences, and even in the retrospective view of the composer himself. He has stated that his attempt to create a conceptual piece to critique conceptualism risks falling into the same aesthetic trap he initially set out to criticise—a kind of meta circle-dance ultimately leading to a catch-22 situation, where being right is just as problematic as being wrong. Indeed, *Popping* is a heffalump, a brutal statement, a Frankenstein's monster of mismatched parts, clanking mechanics and dragging chains, though with moments of genuine warmth and quirky humour that supply the work with air and variety.

As a member of the Cikada Ensemble and contributor to the album, this liner notes writer,

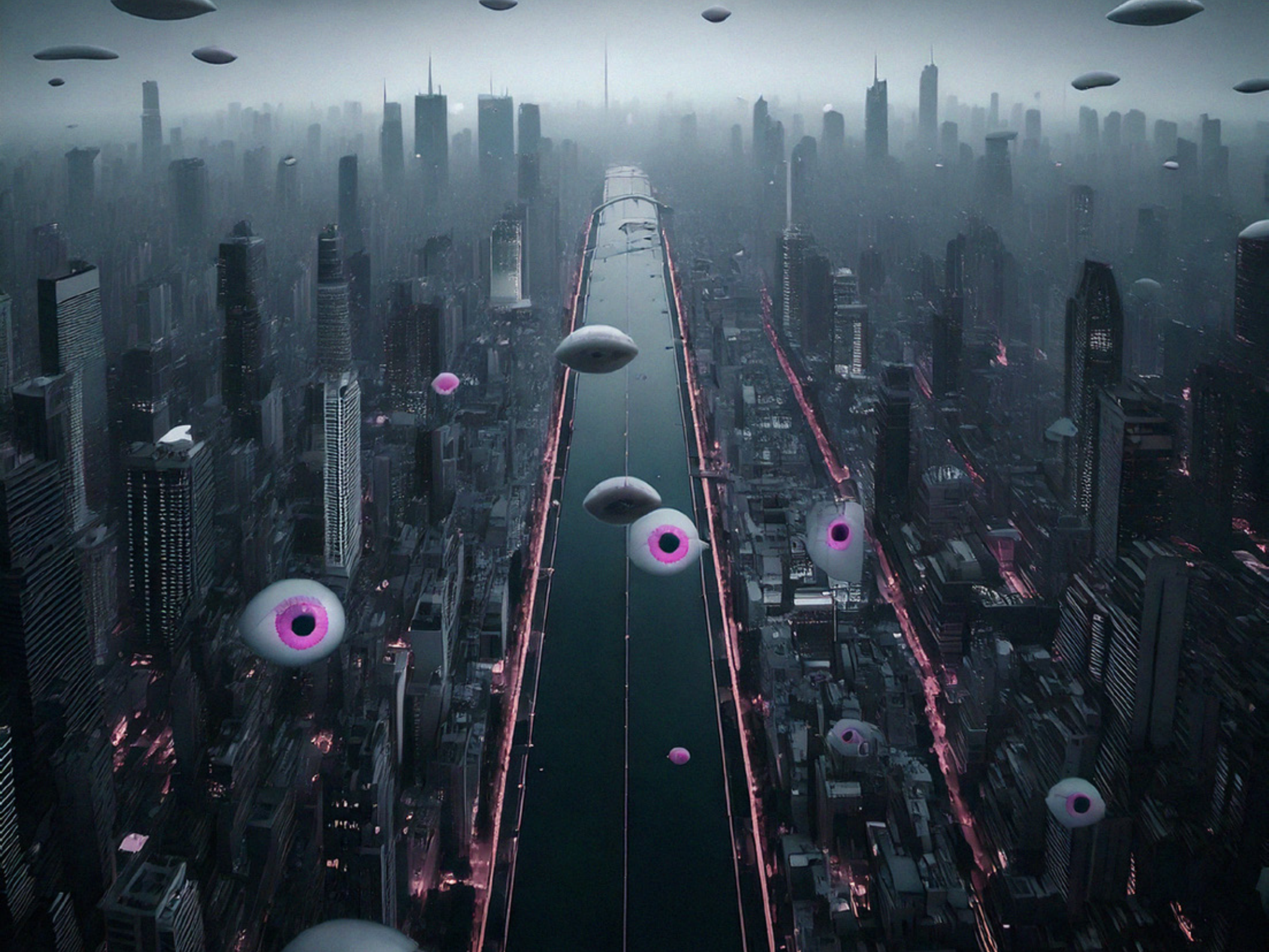
yours truly, ought to include his own experience of the work. The first thought that comes to mind is that this work is absolutely not for everyone, though it is definitely for some. The stubborn insistence on simplicity over rigid avant-gardism makes sense to me, and I see the humour in the resolutely, demonstratively non-groovy futura-pop Jon Øivind creates. We need not hide from the fact that *Popping* is exhausting material to tackle, as the piece often contradicts the natural inclinations of instruments made of wood, metal, and horsehair, almost turning the musicians into cyborg-like executors of mechanical tasks. But we are talking science fiction here, a possible future image among many. If the audible result had been, to use an overly dismissive term—*generic contemporary*

music—the work would have lost a vital ingredient of its meaning.

The concept of “meaning” in an aesthetic-theoretical sense (briefly and imprecisely enough explained as “significance”) is central to engaging with this piece. In many ways Popping demonstrates the challenges of programming music; it’s a work that goes beyond its borders in its attempt to describe a culture, to tell a story, and act as a point of debate “all existing together simultaneously”. And all this is to be communicated through a set of tones and some words. It is up to the listener to form their own opinion (here in the sense of *significance*) about whether *Popping* bears the weight of all its meaning, of everything the work tries to convey, argue against, and mock. I am of the opinion that yes,

it works—just. The composer has been in two minds, but I believe he has ended up at roughly the same conclusion. Some things are worth doing, if only to find out how they turn out. In any case, at least the fictional Harry Lemen is definitely out of the picture.







JON ØIVIND NESS

Jon Øivind Ness (b. 1968) studied guitar (1987–89) and composition (1989–1995) at the Norwegian Academy of Music with Olav Anton Thommessen, Lasse Thoresen and Ragnar Söderlind as his mentors. Ness won the Norwegian Society of Composers 'Work of the Year' award in 1993 for his orchestral work *Schatten*. He was nominated for the Edvard Prize in 1997, 2000 (2 nominations) and 2002, winning in '97 and '00 for *Cascading Ordure* and *Dangerous Kitten*, respectively. Ness was composer of the year for Trondheim Symphony Orchestra (2002–03), Oslo Philharmonic (2012–13) and Bodø Sinfonietta (2012). Ness's music has been nominated three times

for Spellemannprisen (Norwegian Grammy Awards), and he won in 2010 with the CD *Low Jive*, together with Oslo Philharmonic. Ness's tonal language is based on the use of bi- and polytonality developed structurally (or sometimes only colored) with quarter tones. He tries to approach microtonality from different angles — spectral, untuned, melodic (especially from Arabic traditional music). In recent years he has devoted himself more to arranging music in other genres. His project in 2012 together with Diamanda Gálás and KORK was singled out by Wire editor Rob Young as the third most important international musical event of 2012.

Since then, he has tried to create artistically challenging arrangements in which classical instruments replace rock instruments using various contemporary music techniques, something which culminated in the Bowie project that he undertook together with Bård Bratlie, Peter Estdahl, Thomas Rimul and KORK in January 2020. He has also arranged/adapted music of Sibelius, Grieg, Sæverud, Clash, Burt Bacharach, Javid Afsari Rad and Harpreet Bansal.



CHRISTIAN EGGEN

Christian Eggen (born 8 January 1957) is a Norwegian conductor, composer, and pianist, recognized as one of the most influential figures in Norway's music scene.

His expertise spans contemporary music, genre-merging projects, installations, television and radio drama productions, film, theatre, jazz, opera, and classical music. Eggen began his conducting career in the early 1980s, having already established himself as a successful pianist. In 1988, he became the conductor of the Norwegian contemporary music ensemble Cikada, and in 1993, he was appointed artistic director of the Oslo Sinfonietta.

He is renowned as one of Europe's finest interpreters of contemporary music, collaborating closely with composers such as Morton Feldman, John Cage, and Helmut Lachenmann. Eggen has conducted leading orchestras, including the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra Filarmonica della Scala in Milan, and the Royal Philharmonic in London.

As a composer, Eggen has created music for various formations and settings, including his first opera, *Franz Kafka Pictures*, which premiered at the Norwegian National Opera in 2013. His contributions to music have been recognized with numerous awards,

including the prestigious Nordic Council Music Prize in 2005 with the Cikada group. In 2007, he was appointed Commander of The Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav for his work with Norwegian and international contemporary music.



CIKADA

Cikada has been a key player on the Nordic contemporary music scene since its formation in 1989. Never afraid to follow its own path, the ensemble continues to renew itself through astute, innovative programming, and the ever-present desire to let audiences experience some of the best music of our time. The ensemble has since the outset consisted of ten permanent members: flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, string quintet and conductor. It performs at prestigious festivals such as Donaueschinger Musiktage, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Klangspuren Schwaz, Sacrum Profanum, Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik, Bergen International

Festival, Warsaw Autumn, ECLAT Stuttgart and the Ultima Festival, of which it is a founding member.

Over the years Cikada has commissioned and premiered 200+ works by some of the today's leading composers both internationally and domestically. This includes collaborations with composers such as Carola Bauckholt, Richard Barrett, Laurence Crane, James Dillon and Liza Lim, as well as recent commissions from Georg Friedrich Haas, Malin Bång, Clara Iannotta, and Klaus Lang. Cikada is also a strong protagonist for the many exciting voices of new Norwegian music, with large commissions and portrait concerts by Eivind

Buene, Lars Petter Hagen, Jon Øivind Ness, Asbjørn Schaaton, Maja Ratkje, Rolf Wallin, and Kristine Tjøgersen to name a few.

Cikada has released numerous albums for ECM, Lawo Classics, Aurora and 2L among others, as well as appearing on several split albums and compilations. Their oeuvre has garnered accolades such as the Norwegian Grammy «Spellemannprisen», the Edison Award and the prestigious Nordic Council's Music Prize of 2005, in addition to several nominations. Cikada Ensemble is funded by the Norwegian Arts Council and Oslo Municipality.





CIKADA

MUSICIANS:

ANNE KARINE HAUGE—FLUTE
ROLF BORCH—CLARINET
BJØRN RABBEN—PERCUSSION
KENNETH KARLSSON—PIANO
KARIN HELLQVIST—VIOLIN
ODD HANNISDAL—VIOLIN
BENDIK FOSS—VIOLA
INGA BYRKJELAND—VOCAL
MAGNUS SÖDERBERG—DOUBLE BASS

CONDUCTOR:
CHRISTIAN EGGEN

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JON ØIVIND NESS 1968
POPPING

1. KURT AND CONLON
SITTING IN A TREE 01:51
2. YUSUF 04:31
3. TEX AVERY'S TEETH 02:43
4. FIFTH WEAL 01:51
5. IFFY JAZZ 01:56
6. ARAB WINTER 02:04
7. IS IT STY OR IS IT GOO? 01:15
8. MICROTONAL PENTATONAL
TWELVE TONE
HOMESICK BLUES 02:16
9. CHRONIC JAZZ HAND
DISORDER 02:13
10. ARAB WINTER ECHO 01:55
11. OGGY PIP 01:23
12. SHITFACED ON HIGH
HEELS 02:43
13. HARRY LEMEN APPEARS 03:34
14. 1. DICTATORIAL SPEECH 00:31

15. A LONG TIME PASSES 03:05
16. 2. SPEECH 00:54
17. SPASTICALLY WRITHING
DIONNE WARWICK IN THE
LAND OF MAKE BELIEVE 01:21
18. 3. SPEECH 00:31
19. LOBOTOMIZED PINK
FLOYD COMFORTABLY
NUMB 02:05
20. 4. SPEECH 00:31
21. DEPRESSED DIANA ROSS
UPSIDE DOWN 46:14
22. 5. SPEECH 02:15
23. SZYMANOWSKI'S GHOST 10:44
24. THE MUSIC ESCAPES 03:59
25. HYMN 01:47