Ever/never — Code BMUS - Strike Now

Nineteen hundred and seventy-eight was ground zero for the UK post-punk explosion. The previous few years had seen raw rock n’ roll claw its way back into the mass consciousness, but ‘78 was the year a veritable army of disconnected and discontented art students decided, en masse mind, to pick up cheap guitars, switch on malfunctioning synthesizers and beat upon cobbled-together drumkits. From the art colleges they came, inspired by the throbbing rhythms of PiL, The Pop Group and Pere Ubu, but also by politically-charged reggae and dub such as King Tubby, Prince Far-I and the Coxsone Sound System.

Code BMUS was just such a unit. Four too-smart-for-their-own-good lads converged in London with an itch to join the fray. Pitched somewhere between squatterpunk art-scrabble and headier RIO-style instrumental tangle, Code BMUS carved out their own peculiar identity in an unforgiving London music and art scene. For years they plied their trade, hauling their unconventional set-up – “a rhythm kit built from Indian tablas, Irish bodhrán, an assortment of metal tubes and plates, snare, marching band bass drum and a miscellaneous collection of objects to hit wired up with transducer mics…deconstructed guitar played with bottleneck, bow and sticks on an ironing board” – to all manner of clubs, converted showspaces and improvised venues.

In 1981, Code BMUS brought their musical contraptions to Cold Storage, a meat locker that had been transformed into a recording studio by the fiercely independent and experimental postpunk trio This Heat. The resulting 12” EP, Strike Now, There is No Cover, is a mini-masterpiece of right angles, sharp turns and unclassifiable agitpop. With its driving bass, slashing guitar and inspired junk percussion, Code BMUS echoes contemporaries such as Cabaret Voltaire, Fire Engines, and 23 Skidoo, but Code BMUS operated in the squatter scene, rubbing elbows with Crass and their ilk. Code BMUS’ politics don’t come off as theory, but as the righteous anger of those
who live everyday under the thumb of the powerful and corrupt. The turmoil of their daily lives comes through loud and clear, imbuing Code BMUS’ turbulent music with an immediacy that cannot be faked.

Kicking off a busy 2014, New York City’s Ever/Never Records brings you a faithful reissue of Code BMUS’ overlooked post-punk classic, Strike Now, There is No Cover; four songs of collapse and struggle that resonate loudly as ever, sounding better than ever and available as never before.

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