

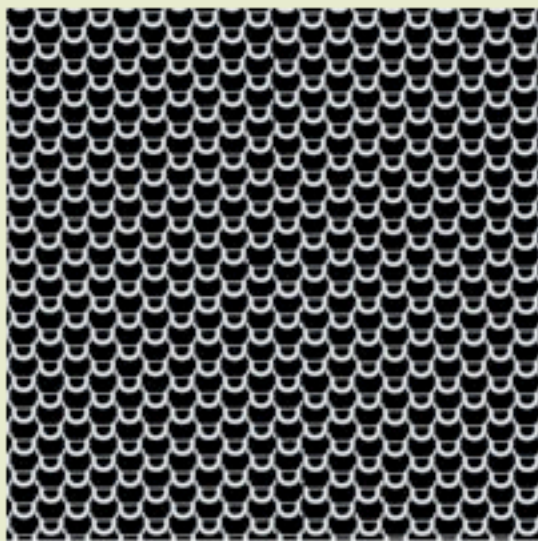
OC WEEKLY

CD REVIEW

Dungen, Tio Bitar (Kemado)

BY DAVE SEGAL

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Who knew heady-mental Nordic prog rock would blow up in the '00s? Perhaps beneficiaries of the blossoming freak-folk movement (please, don't snicker) running parallel to it, bands such as Dungen and Circle, as well as the Fonal Records posse, received some residuals from the burgeoning love for shaggy folk songs electrified and FXed into psychedelic potions to aid in gamboling through enchanted forests.

Regardless of anything else happening, though, Dungen would be worthy of acclaim, even if they existed in a vacuum. Led by the abundantly gifted multi-instrumentalist Gustav Ejstes, Dungen (pronounced doo-ngen or doon-yen, depending on your source) burst into prominence with 2004's *Ta Det Lugnt*, a vibrant example of bewitching songcraft and breathtaking dynamics tethered to subtle textural mind expansion.

Astralwerks' reissue of 2002's excellent *Stadsvandringar* further enhanced Dungen's appeal among America's new-music cognoscenti. Now with *Tio Bitar*, Dungen have, if anything, gone even further out on a creative limb. The new album is as uncompromising as a true head could hope for.

"Intro" is a turbulent howdy-doo that harks back to Vietnam War-era conflagrations, but then a wistful flute motif enters and a beautiful chill wafts through your head. And that essentially is Dungen's m.o.: an optimal balance of the raucous and the rococo, the smothering and the smooth, the inflammatory and the florid. Ejstes forges gorgeous melodies that don't sound played out, and he couches them in arrangements that consistently thrill and surprise. On top of all these treasures, the production on *Tio Bitar* is stellar. It sounds like an analog recording from 1971 or something, but it's somehow boosted with a vividness denoting state-of-the-art, 21st-century digital technology. It's the sonic equivalent of a rich, psychotropic dessert that's actually good for your health. Savor this rare delicacy.

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