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Three Good Records

By Gregory Sandow

Bob Ostertag's *Getting a Head* (Rift 2, \$6) arrived with a press release that said: "This work features a highly unstable and peculiar recording system which utilizes helium balloons and three tape recorders linked together to malfunction in various ways." How could I resist a record like that? These improvisations join Ostertag's complicated tape manipulations to Fred Frith's guitar and the percussion of Charles K. Noyes. The basic formal prin-

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... ciple is very simple: do something, and then do something else. On side one (*Getting a Head*, with Ostertag and Frith) the sounds move in short, almost breathless little impulses, and though at times they sound random, they're always lively and alert. You know that Frith and Ostertag are listening to each other and—most important—looking for new things to do with strong, even crazed concentration (sometimes with manic glee, too), never just fooling around or digging deeper ruts. Side two (*In Tundra*, with Ostertag, Frith, and Noyes) is peaceful, except for the long piercing high warble at the climax of the first episode. The search for new sounds moves much more slowly than on side one, evolving in long, supple arcs made of smaller, more weirdly twisted parts; and there's time enough between the beginning of one event and the end of the next to enjoy some curiosity about what might be coming next. The high, insistently lyrical final episode—one sound looped around itself many times, I think—is especially lovely.

These albums came unsolicited through the mail, but they have something else in common: They all do refreshing, intriguing things with sound, and ought to be more widely heard than they're likely to be. Maybe you don't listen to new music, but maybe you like to take long walks in the city, looking around with curious delight at odd, stern buildings, lots strewn with old bricks, and people with peculiarly intense faces. Why not try these records and take the same kind of stroll with your ears? You might find them at Record City, 734 Broadway; Record Factory, 17 West 8th Street; or at Soho Music Gallery, 26 Wooster Street. You can order them by mail from New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. Add \$2 shipping charge for up to three records.

