

the New Jersey Transit buses compulsively.) Since moving there, Abaton's been issuing high-quality artists' books. Their small catalog includes a volume of Bortz's plays (reviewed by John Strausbaugh last year) and a group of wonderful artists' books by such well-known figures as George Condo and Olivier Mosset.

A few months ago, I found Abaton's first audio release in my mailbox, a cassette by a duo called Shell. As it turns out, Shell is Nowottny and a 15-year-old pal of hers from South Jersey, Donna Bailey. It's a strange affair: echoey vocals and keyboards mix bits of found sounds and music. The title of the disc is *Shell*, which includes the tracks of the avant-German band Neu! that Dagley mixed in with Nowottny's whispering "LSD" over and over. Nowottny tells me the genesis of the sessions was a series of acid trips she and Bailey did out of sheer boredom in Bailey's bedroom. They'd just drop a bunch of acid and let the tape roll. To kill time, they'd scribble handmade cassette covers with crayons and plaster them with commercially available stickers.

It's hard exactly to pinpoint where the sophistication and experimentation comes from. Nowottny's an intensely creative kid who's been locking herself in her room making art by her own rules. She splits her time between her divorced parents, one in Sparta, one in South Jersey. Nothing much happens in either place. Nowottny tells me the most exciting event in Sparta is seeing the black bears that rifle through the trash.

She's been named art student of the year at her high school and is an avid reader of sociology and biology textbooks. Her mom was a classical pianist, but Nowottny's real influence more likely came from her addiction to Indian variety shows and Bollywood films that aired on local cable stations every Sunday when she was a kid. It exposed her to alternative tunings, a practice that she carried into grade-school

choir practice, much to her teacher's chagrin. She grew up in a culturally expansive environment that included family belly dancing sessions, German oompah songs and Japanese theme nights where the whole family would dress up like samurai and eat sushi. All this in rural New Jersey, and it all somehow makes sense.

When I ask her what's next, Nowottny's got a ton of ideas. She'd like to remix symphonies with industrial music. Machines with orchestras. Drills and cellos. German cabaret music with Egyptian music. There's more Shell stuff, which will be recorded this summer when school's out; it'll be more pop, she says.

More practically, there are plans for Abaton to remix and flesh out *Afraid of Me* into an album-length CD, with a bunch of new songs, possibly including one about Hunter S. Thompson. In the best-case scenario, Nowottny will hook up with a sympathetic producer, one who'll realize all her remarkable ideas into something extraordinary. In the worst, she'll go blazing into mainstream rock history, like a Smashing Pumpkins or Led Zeppelin.

Either way, we've only just heard the beginning.

*Afraid of Me* is available at Other Music  
or from Abaton Book Co.,  
116 Spring St., Newton, NJ 07860;  
973-300-9886, fax 973-300-0714.

