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Al Karpenter Greatest Heads Hegoa/Night School DL/LP Greatest Heads opens with “We Are All Karpenters”, a bleary eyed work song, or anti-work song, that swells fitfully with drum rolls, screeching fuzz and a faltering cut and copy from one of those cinema surround sound idents where the pitch swoops almost unbearably high. The groaning refrain “We are all karpenters of life ...of sound ...of love” is followed by “but we are not good at it” as a refusal of productivity and a sly fib. Precise and shambolic, dextrous and sloppy, personal and political as each moment demands; Al Karpenter are actually very good at a lot. But their tools are not the proverbial master’s.

Jointly released by Glasgow’s Night School and London based Basque label Hegoa, Greatest Heads is Al Karpenter’s fourth fulllength album, not counting collaborations, and their second as a fully fledged quartet following 2023’s The Forthcoming. Starting life as a solo vehicle for guitarist and vocalist Álvaro Matilla (aka Al Karpenter) aided and abetted by noise artist/theorist Mattin, the line-up was completed in 2022 by multiinstrumentalists Marta Sainz and Enrique Zaccagnini focusing on bass/vocals and percussion respectively.

Their assemblages cite lightly and ambiguously with shades of Sun City Girls and The Ex here and there, some just discernible Scott Walker pastiche on “The Most Grudgeful Lie”, a sonorous metal clang on “Death Song” that conjures Einstürzende Neubauten’s “Vanadium I-Ching” and the disembodied psychotropia of Royal Trux’s “(Edge Of The) Ape Oven” (they’ve expressed a particular affinity for Twin Infinitives era Trux in the past) on album closer “Perfect Love”. The jaunty but wobbly tempo of “Mundo Chabola” is a kind of cracked copy dembow, jarring perfectly with the album’s other jagged avenues; rock in the vortex of self obliteration, dizzy arcade sonics, glitch electronics, improvisation and plunder, all with the signal scrambling grain of noise shot through like mica. James Gormley