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Iker Munduate Argi Zantzuak Hegoa DL/LP
Pascal Gaigne Iguzki Hauskara Hegoa DL/LP

The Basque Country, with a history of cultural suppression that extended through the Franco regime into the 1970s, and a remarkable language that some think predates the arrival of Indo-European on the continent, has good reason to protect what's theirs. The Hegoa label was set up to promote the experimental music of this region of Northern Spain, and in just three years its conservation mission has yielded several discs with a vocabulary as distinctive as the mother tongue.

Iker Munduate is an artist and musician who brings a delicate sense of composition and design to debut album Argi Zantzuak, inspired in part by new age music, particularly from Japan. Its rippling melodies and frictionless glide recall the futuristic utopias of Detroit Escalator Company and the interior reverie of Nobukazu Takemura, but Munduate's work in a host of indie/punk/hardcore bands from Donostia/San Sebastian suggest this is just one string of his bow.

The label's most striking recent project is its reissue of soundtrack composer Pascal s Gaigne's early ballet score Iguzki Hauskara. Its short sketches use an unorthodox palette of folk guitar, accordion and flute tones, and traditional a cappella chant, and its nagging patterns and droning lacunae wrongfoot the listener so successfully that a unique atmosphere and approach is forged. While Gaigne subsequently worked with film directors including Victor Erice, few soundtracks match the surreal juxtapositions exhibited in Iguzki Hauskara, and the four decades since its original cassette release have only heightened the sense of mystery. With the Basque Country boasting an experimental sound and art event in the shape of the MEM festival, the region is making a unique mark on the landscape.

Derek Walmsley