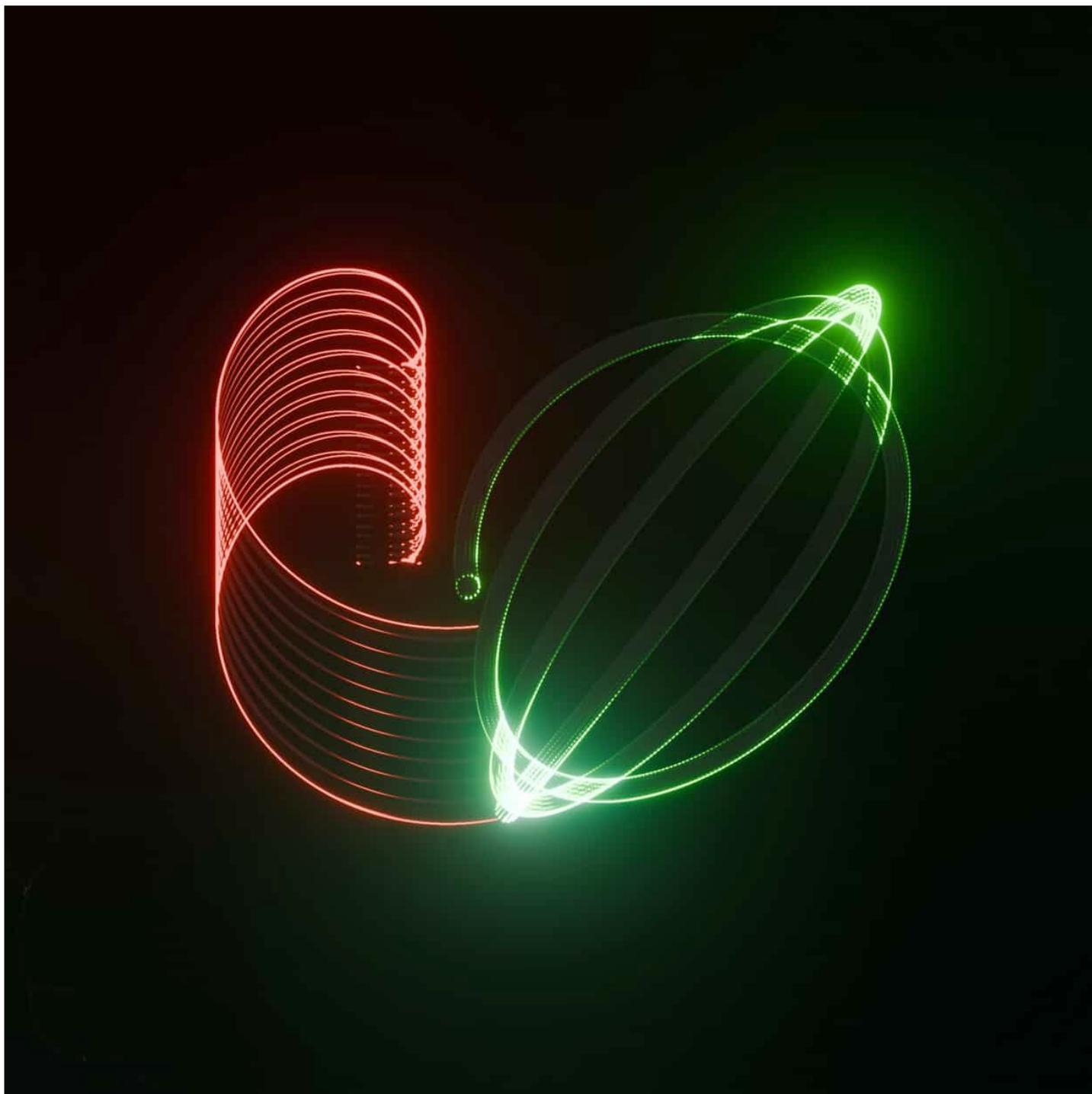


We Are All International Musicians

runner

saylem m. celeste

March 2, 2026



Microtones' new compilation is crazy good.

The cafe is open and the snow is closing in on us. Lately, I've opted into playing CDs during my barista shifts instead of records so I don't have to scramble to flip the 12s every 10 minutes. After successfully finding a dig on a different CD (Theo Parrish's 2022 DJ Kicks Release), the CD runs out and the cafe goes quiet. My coworker checks in with me about what my plans are for the night.

She's made plans to go to a compilation release party headed by local musician-scientist-artist Otodojo. I had seen murmurings online about the release, but my mind was fuzzy about the exact details. Coincidentally, we had received a drop of the compilation CDs before the launch event. I decided to plug it into our system and get a sneak peak of the new release. Microtones' "wave~seed: support for marwa" compilation provides windows into a multitude of worlds into a clear, picturesque focus. Sitting at a cool 65-ish minutes, Passing off its lens from hand-to-hand through its stacked lineup of 16 producers, each track shutters forward with a change of view every time the runtime restarts. The project is in support of the titular Marwa Said, a Gazan mother of three who will receive the profits from this fundraiser compilation.

Otodojo communicated to me that the Said family has been supported by community members through mutual aid efforts for over five years. Otodojo, curator and proponent of the Microtones collective, is no stranger to mutual aid in this fashion, as they have consistently rallied their personal and collective musical resources to support other international support efforts- being one of the few artists-organizers to independently assume that kind of responsibility in our local music ecosystem. Notably, this release is only available as a Compact Disc. Each CD was created in a home-brew set up via a pen plotter and generated fills: adding generative intention to the creatively adorned CD artifact. The artwork aligns well with the overall computational ethos of Microtones' larger imprint as a collective, record label, and event series. Pulling from their website, Microtones is a project that "(appreciates) music from musical artists from around Ithaca and beyond who are pushing the creative boundaries of electronic music", later on adding that they, "are now also hosting events in Detroit where we wish to play a small role in helping bring people together, build camaraderie through art and music, and convert sound into tangible support for people."

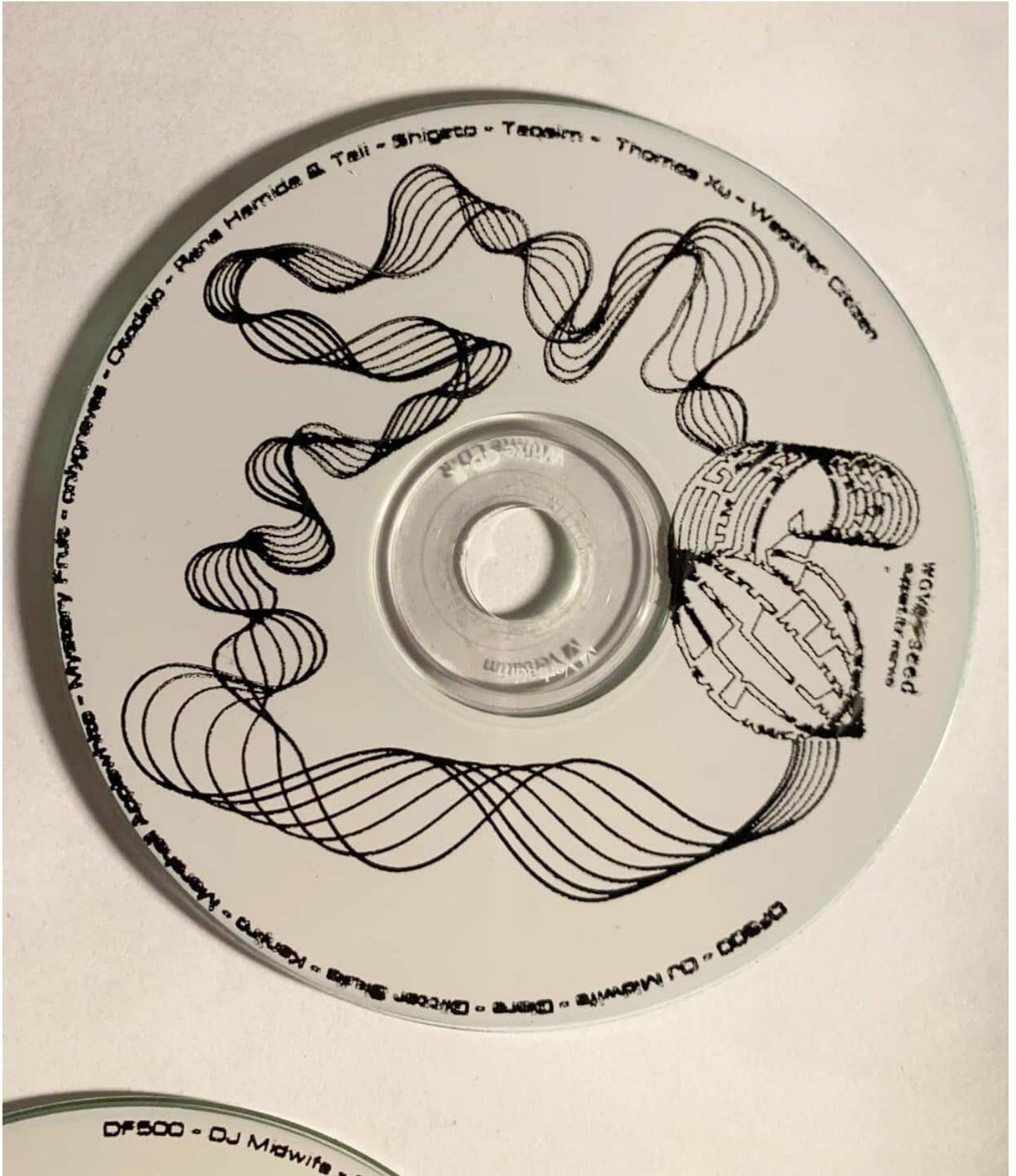
After the first couple of tracks, it was clear this project found its place in the cafe's rotating collection of local projects to boost. During my first listen, we realized there was no printed track listing: This bummed us out because we wanted to know names behind these intriguing tracks. As someone who knows the backend of working with this many artists across physical-digital space, time and experience levels, I completely understand how this could

have been overlooked. Separating the results from the potential intentions, I actually think that the omission of the track credits adds an additional layer of reflection regarding its original purpose - that being collective international solidarity. When creating instances of resistance through art, many groups have chosen to take on collective identities as a mark of humility; The theory being that the removal of individual iconography de-centers the individualistic tendencies and temptations that the western art world generates social capital from, and recenters collective power.

I'm harping on a clerical error here and probably making it into something it's not. However, I do believe it is uniquely poetic how our creative projects ultimately determine their own contexts. They reveal their own intentions and desires, outside of realms of our control.

This compilation left a deep impression on me. It demanded our attention by listening intently instead of jumping around the track list. It provoked me to dig online to find more information about the project. Thanks to my friend CC for showing me the compilation on Bandcamp, I discovered the enigmatic track titles on my second listen. Tracks like "At Park Echoes (Glimpse)" by Glare made me reflect more deeply on the compilation. It resembled as a sonic painting of a curatorial carousel of moments in space-time, with accents of somatic warfare and tension. Glare, a collaborative project between Detroit-based artists Gallons and Cherriel, perfectly encapsulates the whirring of our mechanized perspectives with this standout track. The sound collage creates a rhythmic chopping similar to a helicopter. Throughout the track, the layers of sound circumnavigate scenes of distress, altered language, and seeking. In this way, the track creates a distinctive and vivid image. It demands that you witness it, and it caught my attention. I keep finding myself wanting to peek into this vision a little longer.

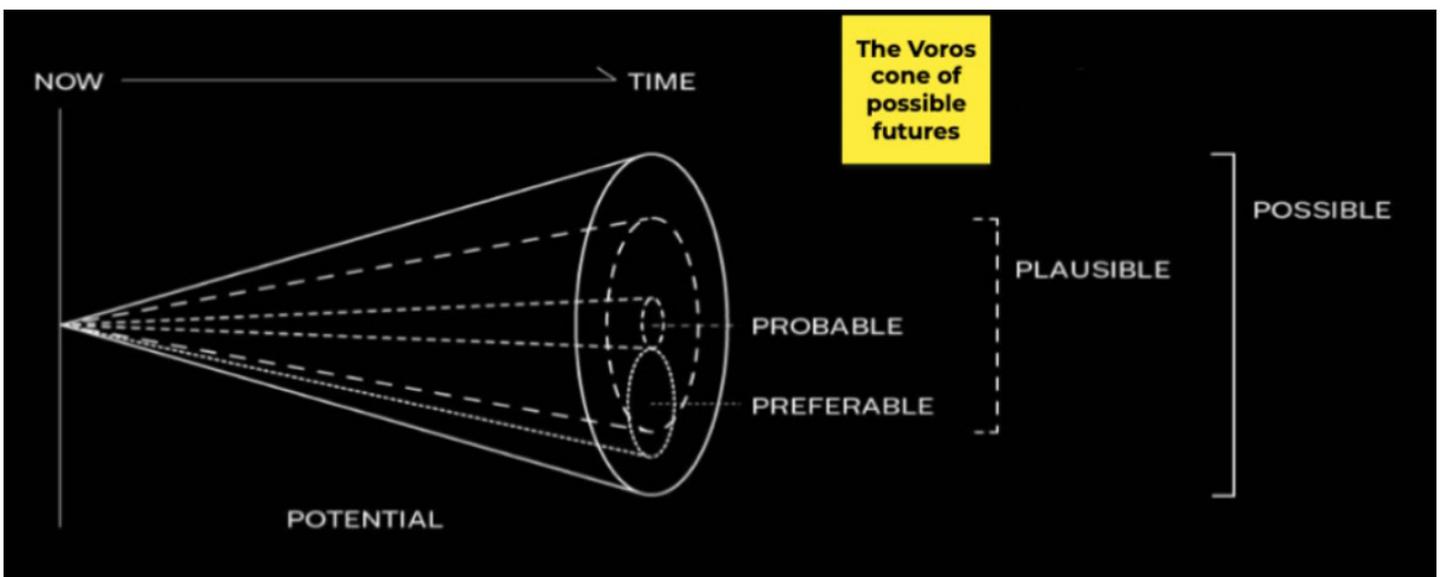
Knowing the catalogue of some of the contributors, it is exciting to hear catalogue-bending contributions from artists like Thomas Xu and Shigeto. Xu's "carep2" opens the compilation with plinking ambient synths and deep-breathing pads, offering something soberingly different from the usually (lovingly) unpredictable producer. This track offers the gentler, focused gaze of Xu's explosive sonic experimentation. Shigeto's "Tunnel Digger" utilizes sweltering reverb effects (perhaps in a way that could be read as breathlessly full) in an homage to early Chicago acid 'trax', such as Phortune's "Jiggerwatts." It's stimulating to see these two artists contribute something outside of the "expected." In the middle of compilation, the ear-bending acid cuts right through. It builds some heavy anticipation for the tonal shift second half of the track list.



“Nami Nami” (translated to “Sleep, Sleep Little One” in English) from Arabic experimental/ electronic femme duo Taqsim, composed of Layan Srour and Yvonne Pruneau, whispers the code to a traditional Arabic lullaby. Kenjiro’s “lake land meditation” conjures a similar pensive state. Washing over our ears like a mighty wave of cool, clear water, both tracks command an omnipresent and divine intention to create space for reflection where there might have previously been little thought. The makeup of both of these tracks seep into the emotionally serious areas of the mind with tactful instrumentation and focus. Each tone feels purposefully placed, offering an invitation into the inner oasis of communal compassion with living and non-living beings. It’s a vulnerable expression from two sets of musicians that comes through with raw power.

And then there are the tracks that embody the warbling, wiggling capabilities of electronic music. “trying not to ruin it”, “Same Sick Story” and “Big Boot Steppin” deliver clear sonic stomps for a slightly sticky, yet intimate metaphorical dance floor. I personally fuck with this kind of playful choice in music. I can definitely tell that these producers know how to dance within their own bodies and genuinely want me to dance with them. This is a signal of a good track.

Other tracks like “My Will” and “Haddi ya baher Haddi by Abu Arab | sung by Rana Hamida” gently twirl around the full frequency spectrums of your ears with strikingly clear layers of instrumentation. This particular type of sonic legibility stands out beyond the digitally distorted conventions of most modern day tracks. These tracks keep you on your toes as a listener with unconventional song structures that invoke the scenes of a carefully planned music video. Coincidentally, these two tracks also happen to be produced by Microtones residents, and that’s totally not a coincidence that these two producers know how to hone in on the clarity of tones in music production as residents of the collective.



Considering the intentions behind the creation of this compilation, the stand out track is onlygraves' "Introreflection". Mimicking the clockwork precision of 19th century ticker tapes, Introreflection transmits a clear communication of truth-seeking. Its synthesis supplants movement through sweltering tides of sound, commanding images of encrypted communication networks that are only decipherable through inherited access keys. This track makes me feel like I'm inside of an ancestral network that can only be accessed through permissible, consensual witnessing. All of its messages are not harmonious, but they are planted with the timing of a deep breath. When I think of the concept of a Microtone– the musical intervals that are between the keys of the western-tuned pentatonic scales– I think of this type of sonic technology, the sound of the tones that lie in between our systems of expectation, and ultimately our sonic oppression. When we circumnavigate conventional structures of musicality, we are opened up to decolonial processes of music creation that can communicate feelings beyond languages imposed upon colonized bodies. Within that space of opportunity, tangled feelings of struggle and oppression become translatable, and connected to a universal human experience. Within the decolonial, we can begin to see the probable, the plausible, and the possible futures that come into focus through creative expression. onlygraves, whoever you are, you hit something special with this one. Well done.

In a world where dance parties and extended plays are scrambling over one another for our attention-validation and money, this compilation simply does the relevant work of neighborly solidarity that needs to be done. In the same way that Theo Parrish's DJ Kicks pulls from the spirit of the Black working-class Detroit, this compilation pulls from the overlooked spirit of the altruistic international citizen: the spirit of the hopeful, and perhaps even the spirit of our conflicting, yet burgeoning visions of resistance. We could all learn something from artists that choose to mobilize collective resources for a larger, purposeful solidarity. At least, I certainly think so. I look forward to more efforts of solidarity (and damn good experiments within music making) in the future from these artists and their contemporaries, and if you have the extra funds, consider picking up this compilation for someone who wants to hear the unique specificity of tonal intention.

SMC

Favorites: Introreflection - onlygraves, At Park Echoes (Glimpse) - Glare , trying not to ruin it - Glitter Skulls, lake land meditation - Kenjiro

Honorable Mentions: Big Boot Steppin - Mystery Fruit, Same Sick Story - DF500

You can purchase wave~seed: support for Marwa in its CD-Only format at shops in Detroit (Moondog Cafe + Gingko Records) or on the [Microtones bandcamp page](#) for a sliding scale donation. You can donate directly to Marwa and her family [here](#).

Special thank you to Weona Ryder for the copy edit, love you lots. <3

runner