

In 1985, Los Angeles performance artist Anna Holmer recorded a series of shamanistic dream-songs with Southern California composer Steve Moshier, who accompanied Homler's chants with watery synthesizers and rubbery electronic pulses. If anyone is going to make sense of this 31-year-old séance in 2016, it's the New York label RVNG Intl., which has just reissued it.

"The creation story was just me having the overwhelming desire to wear bread, and hollowing it out and putting it on my head," says Anna Homler of the genesis of *Breadwoman*, a long-running work that is exactly as the Los Angeles performance artist describes: a woman dressed in peasant clothes, with bread for a mask—a specter at once primitive and majestic, ancestral and eternal.

The chanting, meanwhile, started in 1982: She was driving through Topanga Canyon in a 1961 Cadillac she called the Whale when a song came to her, but not a song in any language she knew. She sang along, a faithful receiver, and those transmissions eventually became the material on *Breadwoman & Other Tales*, in which she gives voice to shamanistic dream-songs rendered in a style partly reminiscent of Meredith Monk and Joan La Barbara. "It's a found language," she says of the tongue that she began channeling in her *Breadwoman* songs. "I used to say it was invented, but I didn't really invent it; I found it. It bubbled up."

The recordings here come from a 1985 cassette, but if you believe Homler, the songs themselves may be thousands of years old. Noting how certain "words" in her lyrics later turned out to resemble words in other tongues (various African languages, or Serbo-Croatian), she ventures that perhaps she taps into something ancient in her songs—a universal language, a mother tongue passed on to us via her harvest god.

If anyone is going to make sense of this 31-year-old séance in 2016, it's RVNG Intl., a New York label that has made bridging generations an integral part of its practice: linking up psychedelic noisemakers Sun Araw and M. Geddes Gengras with legendary Jamaican reggae outfit the Congos, for instance, or getting Julianna Barwick in a room with no wave legend Ikue Mori. Homler's musical partner for these '80s sessions was Steve Moshier, a Southern California composer who accompanies Homler's chants with watery synthesizers and rubbery electronic pulses, fusing distant past with deep future. (That collision brings to mind Craig Leon's work of stargazing primitivism *Nommos*, which, as chance has it, RVNG Intl. reissued on 2014's *Anthology of Interplanetary Folk Music*.) It would be easy to imagine a project like Homler's getting wrapped up in New Age packaging—birdsong and pan flute and synth pads as airy as spun sugar. Fortunately, Homler and Moshier had something far different in mind, and, consequently, the music on *Breadwoman & Other Tales* sounds as alien now as it must have then.

On "Ee Chê," Homler's chanting, sung in a mode that's not quite blues but not quite not blues, either, flows in multi-tracked circles over a slow railroad chug of white noise punctuated by plunging bass glissandos. Moshier has a knack for finding a single, spellbinding sound and sending it swinging through the void like a pendulum, and here, it is a lone, wavering bass tone that feels less like a musical figure than something inadvertently picked up by a space telescope. Two long, meditative songs, not on the original cassette release, might be the most spellbinding selections here. On the 12-minute "Sirens," Homler squeals and clicks over queasy synth drones, and on "Celestial Ash," delay and multi-tracking are used to stretch Homler's voice into a luminous mist, as she sings a patient, mournful song over looped whispers and coos. It is mesmerizing; 17 minutes pass by in a flash. Whatever your feelings about divining speech from ancestral voices, you don't have to take any of Homler's theories literally to recognize the power in these songs. Wherever they may have come from, they have the power to take the listener far beyond the limits of the known musical universe.