

THE AVANT-GUARDIAN

IS A FREE FORM MAGAZINE DOCUMENTING AND MATERIALIZING KRAAK'S MOMENTARY EVENTS INTO A CONCRETE AND TIME RESISTANT FORMAT. THIS EDITION DOCUMENTS THE 4TH EDITION OF THE EASTERN DAZE FESTIVAL.

'DEAR READER

I'm writing to you from the jungle of Polynesia, the isle of Tavalu. I'm here researching the sound-textural qualities of the Tali bird and its influence on western post-WWII avant-garde. How and why I ended up here involved a wild night in Brussels, a somewhat scruffy man and a dodgy contract. So... At this very moment, I'm sitting in a bar barely worth the name. The bartender only serves warm beer, and I'm deeply wrapped-up in the significance of Tali bird chant.

In his books, a man by the name of Steve Feld elaborated masterfully on the influence of bird sounds and natural phenomena on the music of Polynesian tribes, I will not bore you with the technical aspects of it. One does wonder though, if the results of his research don't owe as much to his personal imagination, as to scientific truth. That doesn't undermine the merits of his writings, since they are beautiful exercises in the thrilling field of exotic thinking.

The exotic is a strange thing; on one hand it is filled with naive excitement about the discovery of the unknown; on the other, it is a bit evil-smelling, as it is one of the tools that colonialism used to dig it's dark, deep hole.

Things started off brightly: curious men, overwhelmed by the idea that the real world

outsized their own, bought ridiculous suits and set out on the discovery of outworldish monuments, located in the desert. Presented with fragments, ruins and unreadable signs, they imagined stories about people and societies living centuries before them in unknown parts of the world. This exploration frenzy eventually lead to a multitude of wonderful ethnographic recordings, a thrilling collection of musical form and imagination.

Soon enough though, their stories got infused with bitterness, as concepts like *the Other* and *Identity* came into play. The adventurous boys felt the mysterious need to define themselves in relation to other cultures. The exotic became problematic, eloquently put by post-colonial thinkers and writers from the 60ties, and proven by history.

While sitting in this bar, I experience that the exotic mostly comes in mixed flavours, requiring an elaborated taste; I enjoy the beautiful colors, but the gigantic mosquitoes are troublesome. The chain of events is never black or white. In the bedlam of the problematic exotic terrific and beautiful works of art have taken shape. Dark, disturbing stories in which arrogant Western men were portrayed, spiraling into lunacy through their confrontation with

A the dangerous, mystic exotic. Read and watch 'Heart of Darkness', its reinterpretation 'Apocalypse Now' and 'Agairre, der Zorn Gottes'.

In this corner of the world, Tavalu wilderness, the beer is not served as cold as in Belgium, but people are equally kind. Each of them can be seen as a universe in itself. They sometimes have a different view on life and reality, but that's not different from anywhere in the West, I suppose... Actually, I'm beginning to understand that Herzog and Conrad do not focus on the non-western at all. They have used the exotic as a lever to create an imaginary world that overpowers the rational and the civilized. The exotic as setting, not as truth.

But I have no intention to lecture you any farther on the exotic. I'm also pretty certain that you, as a reader of this Avant-Guardian, will probably attend the 4th edition of the Eastern Daze festival. At this event you'll get a thorough insight in the exotic, as it explores the exotic in it's purest, mind boggling form. The festival leapfrogs between Japanese free jazz and French trance-folk and bounces from deconstructed opera to traditional songwriting in both Ethiopian and Georgian.

The festival, and my research, revolve around the same thing: the poetic relationship between the imaginary and the real.

Their border is osmotic, both sides bleed into each other and create a habitat for the unexpected and the surprising. Music as a new, unknown world in which we can be adventurous boys and girls again. A world where the other can simply be the other, and the exotic be the exotic, without its foul connotation.

We should feel lucky for that. Today, we are free to explore the exotic and the other fair-mindedly, on an open-ended ticket as it were, 'purified' by post-structuralist thinking — *the fire*, Henry Flynt would have called it.

A last remark, not the least: Andrew Pekler argues that music might not be a universal language. He believes that it is a communicative form in itself: in order to be moved by their singing, you don't necessarily need to *understand* what Asiq Nargile or Afewerk Nigussie are singing about. Pekler points out the mechanics of misunderstanding, which are not necessarily problematic. I think he is right, while my new friend at the bar is babbling beautifully and incomprehensibly (for now). Leave the comfort zone that comes with understanding. Face the exotic, what we don't understand, and make something new out of it.

That takes a big, interesting leap of the imagination.

Enjoy the festival!

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TONY CONRAD

History is like music, completely in the present. An essay on Tony Conrad's legacy.

Jürgen De Blonde

I wanted to end composition, I wanted it to die out.
– Tony Conrad

The ghost of Tony Conrad
It's funny to realize that Tony Conrad was in my life much sooner than I ever could suspect. He played somewhat of a role in the founding of The Velvet Underground, he never joined them, though he was member of the proto-VU band The Primitives. His influence can so clearly be heard on *Venus in Furs* and *Heroic*, both tracks from their debut *The Velvet Underground & Nico*. The first time I heard Tony Conrad's music I almost immediately caught myself thinking: "Hey, this sounds like the viola playing on Venus in Furs." Tony had already been there, without me knowing.

Minimalism too wasn't new to me. I had read about and listened to Glass and Reich, I'd read about LaMonte Young but I never encountered any mentioning of Tony Conrad (or Henry Flynt for that matter).

Later on I got more acquainted with Tony's work through *Dry Bones in the Valley (I Saw the Light Come Shining 'Round and 'Round)* being the last song on *Upgrade & Afterlife* by Gastr Del Sol featuring him on violin, his own album *Slapping Pythagoras* (1995) on the record label Table of Elements and *Happy Days* (1997) by Jim O'Rourke, an album that is seriously indebted to Tony Conrad's work, this is well possible since both Jim O'Rourke and David Grubbs assisted in the making of his *comeback* album *Slapping Pythagoras* which was engineered by Steve Albini and enabled by Table of Elements owner Jeff Hunt.

It's no coincidence that Conrad appeared at first in my life as a ghost, haunting the legacy of the great names in recent music history. It says a lot about his deliberate positioning in history, and towards his peers. It is the result of a consequent applying of his theories about history, life, reality and art.

"You don't know who I am," says Conrad, "but somehow, indirectly, you've been affected by things I did. I don't mind being anonymous though. I hate celebrity."¹



Conrad?
Tony Conrad was an artist of many disciplines. He was a violinist, a filmmaker, a painter, a sculptor, a media artist, a performer. You could say he was a mixed media artist, although he hardly ever mixed the different media he used. You could say he was multidisciplinary, but he just used whatever discipline he could use to express his vision which lied at the core. He didn't aim at excelling in any discipline. He didn't want to professionalize.

The documentary *Completely in the present* by Tyler Hubby gives an interesting overview of Tony's career and life. You get to see both artist and person and how interwoven they were. The movie discloses just how simple and direct Tony's art is and how simple and down to earth art can be. It shows also how much of Tony's art indeed is about being "completely in the present", about the instant effects and workings

of what he was doing, just as much as it was (and is) a comment on art and society in general.

His style of playing the violin was about "listening what's in there, what is *in* the sound." Listening to his music is pretty much the same, it's about listening, about paying attention to the sound itself and to hearing what is going on within that sound. Listening attentively to any sound puts you in the present, be it the city soundscape, a dawn chorus, the roaring of a steel mill or *Four Violins* (1964). It's a way of meditating, a way of connecting to here and now. His music is like that and his abstract films are like that, they put you in an undeniable and non negotiable present to which you *have* to respond. As often, surrender is the path to revelation, and that's when shit starts to happen. If you give it a chance.

His music and his work is not about sentiments. There's no narrative. There's no climax. There's nothing but sound. There's nothing romantic about it. It's about listening. It's not about cosmic harmony. It's non-Pythagorean. It's political. It's psychotropic.

His work is not about beauty. He is not even questioning beauty. Beauty is not the subject. It's about what is there, about being curious and exploratory. "When I have this feeling that I'm working in some territory I can't clearly identify, I feel enormously encouraged. Because it means I've found my way to something important that's not been recognised."²

In fact, he wanted a lot of things to come to an end, to die. In the film, he can be heard saying: "I wanted to end composition. I wanted it to die out." On the Wiki page about Tony Conrad he is quoted on his pickled films: "I was trying to kill film. I wanted to let it lay over and die." In the booklet of his album *Slapping Pythagoras* he states: "Demolish the hegemony of monopolistic culture industries!" "It appeared as if Schoenberg had destroyed music," he says, of the Austrian composer who had ripped up the rulebook. "Then it appeared as if Cage had destroyed Schoenberg. Our project was to destroy Cage."³

Meeting Conrad
I had the pleasure of seeing Tony Conrad perform live at least two times, one time in Brussels in 2000 and one time in Hasselt in 2005 at the Kraak festival. I had the even greater honour performing with the man when I was invited by Xavier Garcia Bardon to join an ensemble of guest musicians to perform "Forty five years alive on the infinite plain" at BOZAR in 2007. The BOZAR performance was a transformative experience, just like hearing his music for the first time, and it taught me a great deal about his work and his thinking:

1. Meeting Tony Conrad in person and feeling his energy and his down-to-earth attitude was exhilarating and eye opening; this was not a pretentious and difficult art fart, not thinking highly of himself as one of the key figures in history.
2. Getting instructions: "The piece is political, there will be two groups of performers, one on each side of the room, one side is the progressive side and is allowed to perform more free while the other side is the conservative side and has to perform as rigid as possible." I got the very simple instruction to play the D note on my bass guitar as consistent and as regular as possible in a slow tempo. The bass guitar at the other side was allowed to be more free and was performed by

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- Stefaan Quix. I remember Stefaan freaking out at the other side while I was being as monotonous as possible. It was a strange, intense and transformative experience to play D for an hour and a half.
3. Getting complimented afterwards by Tony Conrad: "You, Sir, did an amazing job!" I'm still a bit puzzled by this or maybe overwhelmed by his generosity. After all, I only played D for an hour and a half.
 4. The lingering resonance within me this performance has had and the insight into the structure of the work and into his way of thinking only made me even more appreciative of the man and his work.

Completely in the present
To be completely in the present is to be at terms with what is presented to you in the time and space that you are. To be open and accepting to what is in the now.

It could be a paradigm out of a new age book. That's interesting. New age is often about harmony, peace and acceptance; up until the moment something less appreciable needs to be accepted. New age philosophy is very Platonic and Pythagorean in its fundament, it is very often about the harmony of everything. It feels paradoxical in relation to his work, as Tony Conrad is anti Pythagorean and hardly new agey. Yet, to be completely in the present, is to be fully aware of that moment without looking backward or forward, without taking frameworks or external authorities into account. The only authority is the here and the now.

To be completely in the present, to be completely focused on and absorbed by what you are doing, and in extension to mere being, is what Zen (and Buddhism) is all about. Much of the contemporary art music that comes from the United States since the 1950's of the last century is conceptually indebted to Zen and Buddhism, to being in the present and in the now. Much of this music is very much about listening, about paying attention to what's happening, of being aware and mindful. Also a great part of American avant-garde music and of what happened in the Fluxus movement is largely inspired by Zen philosophy. The awareness of silence and sound, the space between notes, listening thresholds, long duration, aleatoric composition strategies, indeterminacy, improvisation, conceptualism even, all of these ideas can be led back to Eastern philosophy and Zen more specifically. Hardly so in the European tradition, which up to this day, is still very much struggling with the romantic ideal of the suffering genius composer, the brilliant mind from which stems the most amazing art since the creation of the Universe (notice the sarcastic harmonics). The European tradition was still very much about being in control, about virtuosity, about predeterminedism, about anthropocentrism even, whereas the American tradition went against that. There's an interesting irony, in spite of a better word, in the fact that certain movements in the European avant-garde of the early twentieth century did however inspire the American avant-garde of the fifties and sixties. There is a lot of futurist and dadaist ideas that have inspired the fluxus and post-fluxus art. Could it be that *good old* Europe got too tangled up in post-romantic wars, unsuccessfully struggling to shake of the old and hopelessly looking for the good? Could it be that the reckless spirit, the headiness, of the New World was what was necessary to fuse these revolutionary early 20th century European ideas with ancient revolutionary Eastern ideas into a more successful strategy for breaking with the Romantic nightmare?

Tony Conrad's music, and as a matter of fact much music out of the drone category, puts you completely in the present or put differently, it can place

you outside of time. There is hardly any linearity in the composing, there is no melody, there is very slow development if any, no looking back, no looking forward, there is only the attention for what is presenting itself to the performer/composer/listener. It's hardcore mindfulness, really.

But, being completely in the present is not only about the formal aspects of music, it has a great political and philosophical backbone to it.

Authority
One of the enigmas that I encountered early, was the fact that Conrad isn't part of the parthenon of great composers, although he was part of the scene. This is addressed and clarified in the Tyler Hubby film *Completely in the present*. Like Flynt, Conrad was a visionary and way ahead of the league, but that only comes clear in a debatable retrospect. This debate is also described in David Grubbs' wonderful book *Records rate the landscape* – "a book that owes as much to conversations with Tony as to any other resource", says Grubbs in his appreciative article ⁴,

Grubbs' book is about how recordings played a role in the sixties avant-garde, in the book he mainly focuses on the work of John Cage, since Cage is also known for his aversion to records. However, the first chapter of the book tells the story of Henry Flynt, occasional partner in picketing with Tony Conrad. Flynt, having made recordings throughout the sixties that only surfaced towards the end of the nineties of the twentieth century. Flynt is known to have considered it necessary to go back into the art world after a hiatus of about twenty five years, to update his views. It does pose the question of how much (unreleased) recorded archives are still there and how recordings can be used in some sort of retroactive way for justifying someone's historical relevance, even though never having been released at the time. These records are records of ideas, of new ways of thinking. These records can also be used to testify for or against someone's importance and ego.

This is also what lies at the heart of the lingering conflict between LaMonte Young (LaMonty Burns) and Tony Conrad over the archive of recordings made by the Theatre of Eternal Music. Theatre of Eternal Music was a collective initiated by LaMonte Young in which Tony Conrad played a crucial role by introducing the violin and the use of just intonation. The whole goal of the collective was to annihilate the idea of a composer and to just play this sound, this music, that was never played before. It was a collective effort of LaMonte Young, Marian Zazeela, Angus MacLise, John Cale and Tony Conrad, amongst others. It is therefore quite contradictory to learn that a) Young does not want to disclose any of the recordings, not even for private listening, b) Young claims to be the composer of all this material.

What use is a recording of an idea when it is not released? Doesn't the idea get picked up by whoever attended the recorded event and thus resonates further in that manner? Doesn't the initial recording, upon release somewhat thirty years later, try to lead back the idea to its source?

What is a composer? What is authorship? What is authority? What is LaMonte Young trying to achieve by holding onto those two years of recordings of Theatre of Eternal Music? According to Conrad it is "because they don't show him [Young] in as strong a light as he would wish" and he continues to say that Young's music is "unashamedly founded in individualistic romanticism"⁵ That is also probably why Young tried to force both Conrad and Cale to sign an agreement that he was the single composer of the music of ToEM, which was clearly a collective effort, but not so in the eyes of Young.

■ **The origins of Western culture**
Tony Conrad is about egalitarianism and freedom. He's obviously asked the question so many of us struggle with: "What's happened to our culture? Why is the system so sick? Why aren't we free?" or any other question that relates to inequality, hierarchies, fake democracies...

Conrad is very much referring to Ancient Greece and how Western civilization is still firmly rooted in that old European thinking tradition. In his unfinished film **Jail** he presents a prison for women, but all the women are played by men, like in a Greek tragedy where all the characters were always performed by men, even the women. However, the men dressed up as women are placed in a jail. Could this be a metaphor?

The typical way in which he presented himself during live shows, always projecting his own shadow, is an almost literal reference to Plato's **Allegory of the Cave** and the more elaborate theory of forms (or theory of ideas). However, Tony Conrad shows both the shadow and its origin. He shows the projection of the idea and the ideal and discloses the both. In doing that he breaks with the ancient idea of Plato that says there is a world of things (shadows) that is imperfect and earthly, and a world of ideas that is perfect but unreachable. Pythagoras installed the notion of the harmony of the spheres and the suggestions that there's a higher order of things, an all encompassing harmony, a divine regulation, a cosmic set of rules according to which everything needs to be governed. "BULLSHIT!" exclaims Conrad. He wants to break this dualism, this division between the heavens and the earth, everything is here and now, completely in the present. Once again, the influence of Buddhism and Zen on post WWII America's art becomes clear. Not so in good old Europe where it is still believed change lies in the alteration of the tradition, always looking back, always stuck in ancestry. His criticism on both Stockhausen and Schoenberg is similar to that on Young, all of them composers according to the romantic idea of the individualist genius.

He explains his theories quite clearly in the booklet of **Slapping Pythagoras** in his typical humorous and punk style, partly addressing Pythagoras directly and partly teaching his own theories. He alleges Pythagoras of taking his ideas from Egyptian and Babylonian culture in the first place. Then he also blames Pythagoras for elitism and for undermining true democracy. His arguments are lucid and solid. This is not just reactionary behaviour, this is well thought over. Pythagoras' theories and teachings lead away from the present, from the here and the now. Pythagoras' believed in a world that

could be improved, in a Universal order that served as a model for the organizing of society. Clearly this is not Tony Conrad's conception. **Pythy** is responsible for the non-inclusive character of modern day Western society and for today's inequality. The Universe of Pythagoras is exclusive and homophonous, that of Conrad could be inclusive and heterophonous.

His music is a display of heterophony, as opposed to homophony. Hetero means different, homo means same. Compare it to heterogenous and homogenous. Tony Conrad's music displays heterophony in that it does not strive for harmony according to Pythagorean arithmetics that are depending on discrimination of certain musical intervals to achieve harmony. Conrad's music goes against this by introducing and allowing all intervals that go against the **harmony of the spheres**, against the mathematical order that was discovered and introduced by Pythagoras. He is interested in what happens when tones and frequencies clash, when different mathematical intervals are introduced into his drones thereby producing a sound that reconfigures your brain and everything you know and have accepted as Western culture. "If you give it a chance." – says Larry Seven about **The Flicker**, an experimental film that investigates into mathematical patterns in similar ways. This applies to much of Tony's work, it transforms your way of listening, if you give it a chance.

He's pondered these questions and has gone back real far to the origins of Western Culture and Western thinking, to a culture that foregoes even Roman culture – let's say that those Romans just helped spread the disease/ideas (there's ideas in disease), to the roots of European thinking in Ancient Greece. The Old Greeks are generally considered to be the inventors of the celebrated idea of democracy, a system that, just like communism and as far as I can see capitalism, never has been executed properly. For some reason those great political, economical and social theories have been corrupted as soon as they were made up. Democracy was corrupted by Pythagorean elitism. Communism by Totalitarianism and Capitalism by an inversion of its own principles.

He was a genius, from the gut, from the underbelly. It's as simple as that.

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| 1. From the 2016 Ben Beaumont-Thomas article in <i>The Guardian</i> https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/mar/22/people-thought-we-were-on-drugs-and-we-were-tony-conrad-the-great-avant-garde-adventurer | 2. Idem. |
| 3. Idem. | 4. http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2016/8/4/tony-conrad-skantagio-an-appreciation . |
| | 5. http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/conrad.htm |

■ **JÉRICHÔ** Jéricho is a quintet making experimental folk music, rooted in the south of France. Banjo, hurdy gurdy, occitan singing and more are the key elements... How does it work, we asked Clément Gauthier (chabrette, ttun ttun) and Yann Gourdon (veille a roue, boîte a bourdons).

Robbert Vermeyleen

rv **The name refers to a city in Cisjordania, but also to operation Jéricho by the RAF. What is its actual origin?**
cg It's related to the city, but it became the name of the group after a dream in a period when we started the group. The Myth of Jéricho is related to the power of a sonic universe and to the movement of rotation: "go around the city and blow your trumpets seven times, at the seventh time the city will collapse and those who would rebuild

the walls shall be doomed". For us, the mythical aspect is not about destruction, but about creating a continuous changing space, ever revolving and open for everything; in which the lucid dream becomes reality, a place defined by poetry inherent to singing melodies and by the dissolution of time/space.

rv **Why did you choose the face of David, from the sculpture of Michelangelo as sleeve?**

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cg You should talk with Elodie, who has designed the sleeve. But something happened in between the different sides of the record. There is a link to history, this world, to people maybe.

rv **In a description of your music, the writer refers to Krautrock. Rightfully?**

cg Not at all, I think it's confusing.
vg I agree. With France, my other band, I can see the reference, but not for Jéricho.

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rv **The lyrics of the songs are in French, and in Occitan. Are they traditional lyrics?**

cg Yes.
vg All the songs, and all the melodies are based on existing songs.



rv **In Flanders, everyone knows there is Breton, Picardian, Basque and Catalan. But Occitan is lesser known. Is it still alive, or is it revived? Do you speak Occitan regularly in the group, for instance?**

cg I can only tell there are 2 million Occitan speakers... not exactly a minority, no? The language is a mix of

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■ **ASIQ NARGILE** PRESERVING HER IDENTITY AND TAKING IT ABROAD: The compilation **Mountains Of Tongues: Musical Dialects Of The Caucasus** brings together songs and instrumentals that were recorded by the Sayat Nova project across 2012 and 2013 during trips across Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. All tracks are drawn from many different musical traditions and several were never recorded before. Stefan Williamson-Fa, one of the founding fathers of the project, provided translation for the following conversation with Asiq Nargile. An Ashiq is a singer who traditionally, accompanied his song with a long necked lute (saz) in Azerbaijani culture and related Turkic cultures.

Hans Van der Linden

AN "I first met Stefan and Ben who run the project when they were studying music in Tbilisi. After they recorded me playing a festival organiser in England heard the recording and invited me to perform. The Tusk festival hosted my first time playing to an audience who were not familiar with ashik music so I was very nervous. However, the response was magnificent and I have been travelling to the UK and Europe for concerts and festivals over the last four years." In 2016 Cafe Oto released the live recording **Yart Yert** as part of their Otoroku label. "I had recorded some songs but never a full album. In Georgia, Turkey and Azerbaijan I am usually invited to festivals or television appearances, it is not so

the dialects you've mentioned. But it doesn't matter... It's more important that the Occitan still produces poetry, literature and music, without excluding the French. Man is natural, and I only can refer to Jan Dau Melhau who claims that Occitan give French its most beautiful word: **amor**.

rv **Jéricho is part of the La Novia collective. La Novia means the bride, how should we understand this?**

cg Just as **the bride**.
yg It's also a wink to Acid Mothers Temple, in particular to their album **La Novia**, on which they do a retake on an Occitan traditional.

rv **Are there other collectives, in France or out there, that are working on the same kind of musical idea's, and that you feel related to?**

cg Yes, there is Hart Brut, who are doing beautiful work in Béarn. Also the Brayauds are doing great stuff with music in the Auvergne, and they are for sure others that we don't know of.
vg There is also Tornamaï, in the Cévennes.

rv **You seem to be inspired by both traditional and experimental music, who are your heroes?**

cg We listen to many records.
vg LaMonte Young, Tony Conrad, and Henry Flynt... But, like Cage said, our music influences the way we listen to other music, and it makes that we appreciate musicians mostly for how they work, more than that their music influences ours.

rv **That's all that I wanted to ask.**

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common for ashiks to release full length albums here."

Georgia

"Georgia is full of music, there are many festivals and concerts all the time with all sorts of music. Georgians can't live without music: they are always singing and dancing. It is a big part of their culture, especially polyphonic singing at church, at feasts and even when they die. For Azeri-Turks in Georgia our music is also very important to us. Especially the ashik tradition.

I believe that it is through the saz and ashiks that we have preserved our language, heritage, religion and identity in this country. Perhaps if it wasn't for the music we would have lost our Turkish identity and become assimilated into the rest of the country as Georgians. Thankfully Georgia respects cultural diversity and there are many opportunities for musicians from different communities to perform. Last year at the state folklore festival I was the only saz player to enter the instrumental category and I was given the first prize award even above Georgian musicians, which really shows that they appreciate my music

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and the ashqi music as well as their own.”

Differences
“At home everybody knows the ashqi tradition, they know the melodies and understand the words: they might love the music or hate it but they are still familiar with it. Young people today tend to listen more to pop music but there is a growing interest in the ashqi music amongst some of them.

When I first came to London to perform I was very nervous and anxious about how people would react to my music but I soon saw that people were listening so attentively and silently and with so much respect. At home people don’t listen so carefully as they know they will be able to hear ashqis play again and again but abroad people listen carefully as if it is a special occasion, a chance they should not miss.

When I perform abroad I feel freer to perform as I like, as at home people will always make requests for this or that song or poem. On stage abroad I am free from these restrictions. Of course a musician must always be aware of time and space, each minute and each second. They must understand what music is appropriate for the occasion. If one goes to perform at a wedding they cannot play a lament or a serious epic, they need to play something that will make people feel happy and dance. Often at a concert I will go on stage with a set list but then play something different. I look at the audience and can feel what they want to listen to.

Performing in different countries has really strengthened me and my music. It is an honour and pleasure to play for new audiences and every time I come and go I feel that I grow as an artist and want to get better and stronger. I have experienced new places and made many friends in Europe. I have learnt a lot from the musicians I have watched and shared the stage with and I think they have also learnt from me.

I have been amazed by how free musicians are there on stage. There are no limitations or constraints. Each person can perform what they want in a very relaxed way. This is something I admire a lot as I enjoy having that freedom to perform and create. This is what all true artists desire. Having audiences who listen and pay attention to so many different types of music and art is very inspiring. I have never had a single problem during my tours in Europe. Everyone has been so polite, respectful and kind to me.”

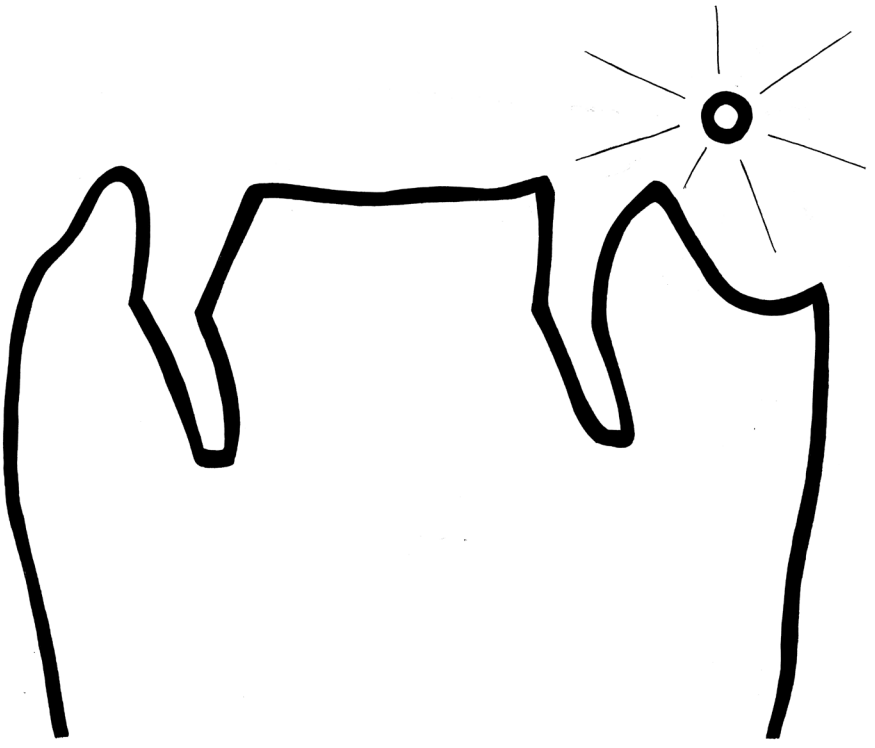
Woman’s art
“My grandparents and family were always listening to ashqi music and this was something that was around

me from a young age on. My grandmother insisted that I learn the saz at a young age after she saw some other female ashqis on TV. I started studying the instrument in Baku but then learnt from many elders from my native region in Georgia. My first performance was when I was fifteen and I have been playing ever since.

Ashqi was traditionally a men’s art. As they would travel from town to town it was not seen as appropriate for a woman as it was not safe and they were required to stay at home and look after the family. It has become more common recently but it is still rare. I am the only female ashqi in Georgia at the moment. Women are able to do whatever men can do or better so there is no reason why they shouldn’t be ashiks.”

Without diluting the tradition
“From the moment I decided to be an ashqi I took on the role with the seriousness and dedication that it requires and I want to continue on this path. I never changed the art, as some women have done, and am dedicated to playing saz and singing without diluting the tradition. At the same time artists will always create new things and in the ashqi tradition each artist would learn the tradition but also add something of their own, new poetry or new melodies. I also want to create new things and try out new stuff. This happens naturally. Sometimes I recite a poem and a melody comes to me. Collaborating with other musicians also leads to new creations and I have been involved in several projects where I have composed new music and performed with artists from different traditions. I still seek to continue on the path of the ashqi, to continue rediscovering and learning old poetry and melodies and it is important to maintain this path.”

Future ambitions
“I recently composed, performed and recorded a pop song with some producers in Turkey. It is my first time branching out into that sphere but it was great as we recorded a music video in the countryside in Georgia, with our traditional costumes and horses. It will be played on music television channels in Turkey and hopefully it will be successful. I want to continue working on new songs and poetry but also to learn old pieces that people are not playing anymore. Many of the old ashqi melodies and poems are very hard to perform so people are forgetting them. I want to continue playing these songs, some of which women haven’t sung before. Other than that I want to continue on the path I am on and keep on developing my art, meeting more artists, releasing more material in Europe and traveling to new countries.”



NOVO LINE Novo Line is the moniker of Nat Fowler, once part of the Baltimore math rock scene, but nowadays transformed into a clusterfucking techno act that delves deeply into the unknown territory of old skool atari computers. Last year he released an amazing record on Ecstatic Records that takes the idea’s of UR, Drexciya and alike deep into the 21st century, without resigning to new technology. Techno used to be a thrilling genre that was all about developing new idea’s and sounds, but then the market started mingling in by producing pre programmed plugins aimed at lazy producers copying each other. Novo Line revives the original spirit and takes techno where it belongs: boldly into a universe where no-one has gone before.

We had a nice chat about his love for atari’s, where he came from and where he is now.

Niels Latomme

NL How did you end up in Berlin, coming from Baltimore? You’ve been around for quite a while, starting as a musician playing in math rock bands. And when did the Atari’s come in?

NF My band Oxes first toured Europe in 2001, and I fell in love with someone. It changed my life, and brought me to Italy in 2004. But small town living, for many reasons, drove me crazy. I had to get out, and so as a couple we emigrated to Berlin in 2007, because it was cheap, we both had friends here already, and it seemed to be drawing many people from all over for its arts and culture. A lot of that part quite frankly was seeing the grass greener on the other side, but it’s worked out enough for us both, for work and for life. I just wish the locals were nicer and the weather was sunnier.

Starting working with Atari’s was an accident. I wanted to make music by myself because I couldn’t find anyone to make music with. I was lucky to find the musician friends I had in Baltimore, but nothing came close in either Italy or Berlin. I wanted to continue in the general direction I did with Oxes, but as a one-man-band. This idea clashed a bit with the idea of electronic music and dance music, at least in any ways I knew of on how to produce. But I was determined to find a way.

I didn’t want to make *math rock* in the way that most people conceive it; I liked how King Crimson’s *RED*, Melvins , This Heat, Cheer Accident, or even Metallica’s *And Justice for All* is math rock. But I didn’t like how most modern independent bands did it most of the time. I moved away from Baltimore at about the same time that my band Oxes was having a few creative crises – so from the beginning with an electronic *direction* so-to-speak, I had certain ideas regarding rhythm and melody/harmony that I didn’t hear much elsewhere.

In the back of my mind, since I moved, I wanted to do something that excited me like those records excited me, but than as a solo act. On the other end, I liked what the Perlon scene and artists like Errorsmith and Soundstream/Soundhack did with rhythmic shifts in live and dj sets (I’m talking back in 2002–2004 here!). Plus, all modern software didn’t seem to allow the elasticity or texture I wanted.

At that moment, I found myself volunteering for a Goodwill/Oxfam kind of place in Italy, called Manitese. We would clean out old houses, and I’d find old computers that hadn’t been touched in years, and a broken DX7II that I fixed. I had a friend, Jeff Donaldson, aka Notendo, back in Baltimore that was making *glitch* art and doing various weird audio/visual things with the Commodore 64 and nintendo. He had an Atari ST, and used Cubase on it. He always raved about its stability.

Some time later, already Berlin, I was figuring out what to do – setting



up a studio, meeting people. My studio landlord was cleaning out his basement and gave me his old Atari ST, because he knew I had those C64s... It took about 2 months to figure out what to do with that Atari ST, and I’ve just added layers of complexity onto my original discovery of how to use it, ever since.

NL It’s interesting that you use an old machine such as the Atari. Techno and electronic music once was about having a new array of new technology that could produce any new sound possible. Nowadays it seems more and more about a retro thing. Is it that way for you as well?

NF I’m not going to pretend to be any scholar on Techno or electronic music in general, but from what I know about some of Techno’s origins, it was about abusing and misusing tools that were made for a different purpose. That visceral first Phuture record was done using machines that weren’t made to do that – you can’t say that about modern equipment or software synths.

I like that early techno approach. I’m squeezing out some new purpose and use of these Ataris, midi tools, and synths for sure. I think it’s a shame that once electronic instrument companies caught on to the appeal of using these tools for purposes aside from accompaniment with acoustic and *normal* instruments. They started to manufacture and market things based on these ideas that electronic artists had and it became a feedback loop in only a few directions, and the only direction things have seemed to go in for a while now is in sound texture, but there is so much more to music than just how it sounds, so I try to explore some of those unexplored facets...

With regards to being retro, for me it’s not a retro thing but a holistic thing: I’ve wanted to not be classified as 8-bit or Italo or 80s renegade or whatever. But I’ve found myself settling into the MIDI tech that was available from about 87–90, because those

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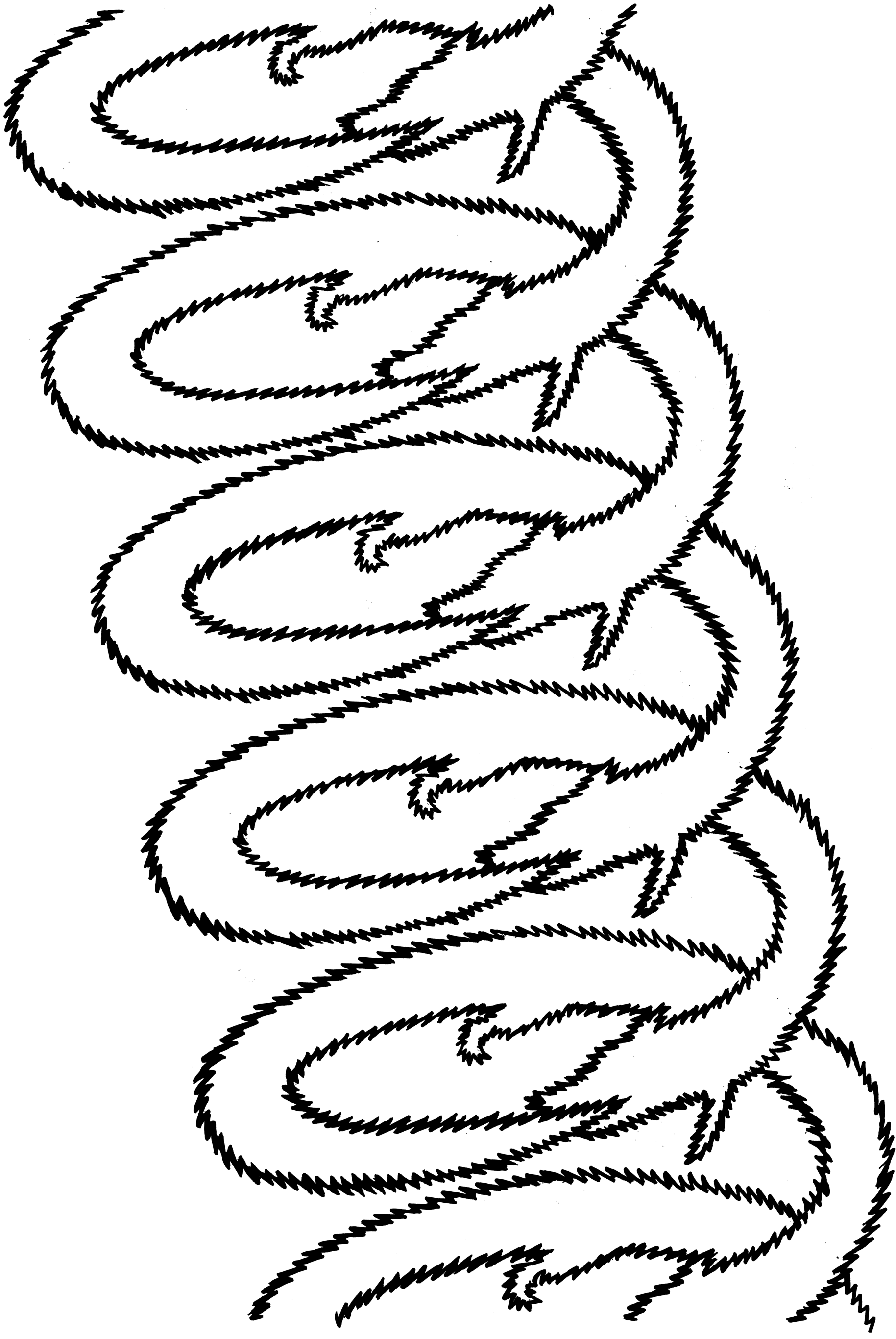
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machines seem to work great with each other, sound wise and technically, and of course the ST and the software I run are also from that era. I've tried throwing in analog/modular, more modern filters,etc, but I have yet to find something else from a different era that fits with what I've built up.

NL **Maybe you can see it as a new form of craftsmanship then?**

NF I can see that with modular, this satisfaction of building up your modular synth and the patch with many cables. For me, what I do with my MIDI cables is somewhat similar. I build up this physical interface for every show, each cable going to a certain place to do a certain thing, and it's very satisfying having this large thing that I can look at, and change physically, and manipulate with knobs, and of course digital buttons.

NL **You refer on the Movements album to the Pythagorus' ideas and that is interesting, as we programmed a movie about Tony Conrad who was explicitly Anti-Pythagorean, in the sense that he was anti-elitist and radical democratic – he saw the theories of Pythagorus as being elitist, as it strived for harmony.**

NF Funny, I just put a Conrad piece in a mix I'm doing to promote the new record.

I think for a certain era, it was important to throw away the shackles of the past, for new music in the 20th century. All the old ideas of composition, harmony, rhythm, aesthetics, could and should have gone out the window. But that revolution is over, just as in visual art. It exists, we have **echtzeitmaskk**, we have noise, we even have Post-Techno made only with software. Soon we'll have AI doing it.

We have people making very normal dance records and professing their love for new music.

I've come up against a lot of resistance to my music from many in these different musical worlds over the years, which has made me give up on even convincing anyone that I'm **on their side** so to speak: it's not that its history hasn't informed me; it's been completely integral to the formation of what I do, but I don't wear my influences on my sleeve.

As for Conrad's beliefs: I could get sidetracked here and challenge the idea of democracy in its opposition to harmony (would someone want democracy in order to create chaos?) but I'm also ill-informed. But as far as disregarding the ideas because they were elitist, especially if they are 2500 year old ideas. that is misguided. But in any case, using what we know of Pythagoras's secret school inherently makes it not elitist: I'm not in any school, I literally just watched a youtube video and started digging around the internet and eventually into paper books on the subject.

But as for the ideas, there is something to be said about harmony and being pleasing to the ears, to form that is harmonic and based on principles derived from natural phenomena. When we listen to music sometimes we like it because it's beautiful, other times because its ugly. I try to make something in between of course like many people do, but using the Pythagorean frequencies and scale, which is luckily possible with this old equipment I have', the tones reverberate better in a space, they mix together better in the electronics inside an analog mixer. They are slightly off what we are most accustomed to listening to that they offer something new to the ear without our minds really becoming conscious

of why. Dissonance and Consonance sound different as well.

Also its important to know that the label wrote the album text, so me telling them about using the pythagorean scale gets translated into "ALBUM BASED ON PYTHAGOREAN IDEAS BLAH BLAH" ☺

NL **Where does the name Novo Line comes from?**

NF The area I live in, Neukoelln, which I joke that I **founded** because in 2007 it was so little known as even a place to look for apartments, is full of these storefront Casinos. Sometimes up to 5 on a single city block, and most are empty or near empty, with a bartender standing under some crazy lights, and open 24 hours a day, or my favorite, **23 hours**. There were A LOT more 10 years ago, but they are still quite widespread. It's not clear if they are money laundering setups or what. They are called AutomatenSpiel Spielotheks, and when I started using the ST to make music, I realized that I was kind of gambling when I made music, because it was based on random generation of notes, and literally translated from German, AutomatenSpiel is **Automatic Game**, and I liked this idea of producing this music using the most archaic tech I could manage to string together with MIDI cables, making something that sounded new, almost automatically. So I was at a bar one night with Francesco and Leila (Sea Urchin, but this was before Sea Urchin!) talking about this new thing I was doing, and Leila didnt like the name AutomatenSpiel, because it was too literal. She pointed out that good names have a level removed between the idea/concept and the name. She was right, and like a strike of lightning, I screamed out "NOVO LINE!"

and Leila loved it: most of these Casinos have these swirling lighted signs in the window, advertising the digital slot machine brand (from austria where Leila is from!) called Novo Line, and in fact what I am doing, in contrast to what I used to do (make music with guitar in a band), this was a very new, or **rovo**, direction, or **line** to be going in. The name worked, on many levels, and I like playing with the idea of using the name of something so ubiquitous that nobody even notices it. My artist name is vaguely familiar for many people in Berlin, but I'd say only 1% understand why: they see it every day, multiple times, in storefront windows that they dont even look at.

NL **Do you have a fascination for space travelling?**

NF I don't. Or maybe just a healthy fascination? If you're referring to the album cover,the earth image is the very first live image of the full Earth, ever transmitted to earth from satellite, on a machine my father built at his job, in 1974. Nokia has the rights to the patent since 1995 (no, I dont have a waterfall of nokia money, he was a company man and saw no credit). I found the original diapositives a few years ago in my parents' old house in a locked filing cabinet I had to force open when I was emptying the house. my jaw dropped, so I committed to having them become future album covers. This is the first one, designed by my sister in law, using the earth as the centerpiece. There are more to come!

1. I tuned 127 notes by ear to a tone generator, within .6 cents accuracy, on 4 different synths, very different from a scale preset called *Pythagorean*.

"RICHARD DAWSON **“My roots are in something much more ancient than British folk and my branches are tickling the future”.** The International press is already raving about Dawson's new record *Peasant*. The album is a proper concept record about a small medieval community under pressure by higher powers. Exclusively for the festival Dawson will present the record for the first time with full band for the Belgian audience.

Hans Van der Linden

It's an understatement to put that Richard Dawsons musical style is kind of idiosyncratic. Those who saw him perform at the KRAAK festival in 2013 will surely remember the thrilling acapella version of **Poor Old Horse**, which adds to the feeling that his music might be perceived as both very personal and emotional. When asked how Dawson himself feels about his intentions, he puts it like this: "No need to describe it. It's just talking, or painting, or walking. The balance has to be right for it to work properly. I know what you mean by **emotional** but I would prefer to say **energetic**. It has to go through the change at some point from a big raw slab of stone fire into something more supple and light."

Dawson is not that keen to talk about his musical influences: "It's important to listen to everything and not judge. Don't buy the official word on what's hot and what's not. Make your own mind up. The most important thing is friends. Also, I think it's only possible to play music with friends."

On **Peasant**, his latest record, Dawson is joined by a full band which adds a new chapter to his oeuvre. The level of eccentricity is peaking but this is a truly Richard Dawson record. Rather than being a logical step in his musical evolution, this extension seems to be a decision that was made along

the way: "The concept of the overall sound of the album was something that came before the songs. You've got to decide whether it's going to be canvas, a sheet of wood, paper, or a wall, before you can start your painting, right? Once the album was made it became apparent I would have to put a band together to share it. I have avoided doing a band for a long time but there was no avoiding it this time."

Tales about the Old North

In the kingdom of Bryneich / verging on a maddy crook of Goquet / a dice of houses cast with clay and sheepdang / Through a soup of starlit peatsmoke / Gradually emerging as we descend

With these words Dawson introduces the listener of **Peasant** to the medieval kingdom of Bryneich, the Welsh name given to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernica which is located in Yr Hen Ogledd, the Old North, located between contemporary England and Scotland. To stress this concept, this approach is heavily accentuated in the videoclip of **Ogre** where a mediievally dressed Dawson acts as a narrator at a campfire ceremony not really different from the atmosphere **The Wicker Man** evokes.

Being aware of the fact that Dawson also performs in a band called Hen Ogledd, one could assume strong ties with history. This is true and even surpasses the British folk tradition, where Dawson doesn't feel related to: "No, my roots are in something much more ancient than that, and my branches are tickling the future."

Previous records show his interest in concept albums, but this time Dawson pushes the idea a bit further. He reflects on the concept of **Peasant**: "The eggshell has a map of the old north painted on it. Does the shell constitute the egg? No it does not. The egg is all of its constituent parts, and how it got there, its parents, and whoever it will give birth to or whoever it will feed. Egg has many qualities. Egg is a powerful symbol. Got to break the egg and get cooking to release the flavour and imbibe those nutrients. Lots of different ways to cook an egg." Dawson describes societal ailments such as superstition and violence, that were present in the old world and relates them to our current world.

The deluxe edition of **Peasant** on the Weird World label holds a set of postcards. Is there a cunning idea behind this in terms of Dawsons conceptual vision? "Maybe someone



might want to send a message to a friend from a foreign country? The postcards are drawn by Iris Priest, a superb artist living in Newcastle."

Rooted in Newcastle

Dawson is living in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, home of the TUSK Festival. How important is its local scene and is it reflected in his music? "I don't get out to gigs a fraction as much as I used to but obviously I still love it here. The great thing about Newcastle is just how supportive and non-competitive it is. The influence of many musicians from this area is in this record, as it is in all of me, not just the music but the people, mostly the people. Whether the album is a product of here who can say? If it were made somewhere else, by someone else, it might appear very different but a few layers down would be the same right into the middle."

Dawson often collaborates with fellow Newcastle inhabitant harpist Rhodri Davies, for instance in Hen Ogledd. On **Peasant** Rhodri's sister Angharad and father John are playing along too. How do they relate? "Me and Rhodri have a very big area of crossover in terms of what we enjoy in music. Although our approaches to music making are weighted quite differently I would say there is a great deal of commonality of approach, just in different measures; preparation, now, control, bedlam, listening, structure. He is a very ancient musician, as all musicians should be."

What will the future bring? "I hope that the humming in my right ear will disappear soon, it started yesterday and has frightened me a lot. I'm writing five songs for a film about the Old Hexham Gaol by Matt Stokes. I'll play these songs with the band in various places whilst the wave rolls on. And I have some very strong thoughts and senses regarding the next album."

■ **KEIKO HIGUCHI** ■ Keiko Higuchi is a Japanese vocalist and musician with an impressive résumé, who has already released nine albums, both in groups and as a solo artist. Her music — covering genres like avant-garde, jazz and free improvisation — has been released on labels such as Improvising Beings, Utech and Music Atlach. Her live performances are particularly intense because she uses expressive body movements to create certain vocal sounds, along with her use of the piano as a percussion instrument. On The Eastern Daze Festival, she will perform with bassist Luis Inage (Aural Fit, Derakushi).

Justin Faase

JF To start with, can you tell us a little about your history, musical background and how you became a singer?

KH I was born in Tokyo, Japan and spent most of my teenage years and a bit more in the States, and the last few years there I began performing with a Boston improvisation group called Saturnalia. After coming back to Japan in '98, I started doing solo performances. Ever since then, I've worked with theatre people, butoh and contemporary dancers, many musicians in free jazz, improvisation and noise for the last 20-something years. I don't think I did have any specific ideas for becoming a singer. I was at a music school at some point, and that experience has given me the idea to use my vocals as an instrument. Just the last 10 years or



so, I started singing songs again. I am still improvising in some groups I have regular shows with, aside from my solo project.

JF Do you have a different approach when working solo as opposed to performing with others?

KH Working on my own is a completely different working process. For solo projects, I'm concerned about time and space and how that works with the dynamics made with voice and piano in the context of songs. When I work with others, choosing musicians is of great importance. After deciding whom I want to work with, I tell them what I do and how I work and give total freedom to them. I might give some instructions like "surprisingly slow, play as a clumsy old person, like a heart beat of 34 per minute" and so on. It is up to them to follow that or go completely the opposite. Of course, it can be limited for me in some ways, but there are things I wouldn't be able to do on my own.

JF Most of your work is improvised, yet your music has a clear beginning and an ending. Do you have certain basic ideas or structures in mind when you create music?

■ **LEO SVIRSKY** ■ Moving sound. Piano player and accordionist Leo Svirsky is an ex-punk with Russian roots who dwelled from Russia to Washington DC to end up in The Hague. He specialized in contemporary classical and avant-garde music — collaborating with Christian Wolff, Marshall Allen, Jaap Blonk and Veryan Weston. He just released a highly recommended album that displays a deepened meaning towards deep listening accordeon music inspired by the innovations by Pauline Oliveros.

Right before Leo went off to Düsseldorf to play at Klangraum, we talked about his love for accordion and the mystical side to his album and his use of the accordion.

Robbe Van Petegem

rvpHow did you end up playing the accordion?

LS Ah. My background is as a pianist and I was working a lot as an improviser, but a lot of the venues for that kind of music don't have really great instruments. There are not a lot of opportunities to do your thing properly. So I thought: what's something portable that I can still use some of my keyboard skills on? I picked up a second hand accordion and just started working on it. Then I fell in love with it. Most of the interesting things about accordions have very little to do with it as a keyboard instrument, but because you produce the sound by moving the bellows from the left to the right.

I found that I was able to do all the things that are normally associated with electronic music. My

accordion goes one octave higher than the piano, which produces these very high pitches, very close to sine tones. They do strange things that you could do by moving speakers around. They are more exciting sonically, because they are produced physically by pushing air through metal.

This is really a exciting aspect, compared to piano. With accordion, you have to make it move to keep on making the sound. It is also very good for playing fast stuff, but it is really unique how you have these two pitches that are static but are moving away or apart from each other. Pauline Oliveros is probably the first person to just use that aspect of the instrument. I don't think it is possible to write for accordion and not think about her.

A KH I do have some basic ideas and images for the most part, but for some I just have lyrics, and that's it. I try to keep the improv essence in most of the songs. I have clear beginning and ending even with improvised ones because I perform songs. Also, the way I play is different each time for many tunes because I change the way I start differently to keep them fresh for myself, too.

JF Is the piano the perfect instrument for you?

A KH I may be using the piano like a percussion instrument that brings a groove or a specific rhythm. For me, a song represents a timeline, and I play and sing to show the dynamics of each moment. What I want to do with my voice is to get all the emotional aspects and senses integrated in one tone or note at a moment to reach a void, so to speak. It's not that sadness or happiness rely upon the lyrics. I want to bring out nothingness. That can be said for my piano, too. When I play super fast, I do it to have all the grains of sounds to be nothing, zero. Like when you draw many points on a paper, it becomes a line.

JF When playing live, your theatre-like body movement and face mimics seem to be an important aspect, almost like an instrument itself. How important is the voice/body connection to your music?

KH That is a very important part of my performance. I am trying to free my own body, in order to free my voice. I use my body, do the movement, not because I am dancing, but to create certain sound (voice) out of my body, including my face or fingers.

JF You use both Japanese and English lyrics. How do they come together?

A KH When I sing in English, I guess I am more free in a sense because it speaks out. It slips out of my lips. When I sing in Japanese, I prefer pronouncing them delicately and deliberately, maybe because each single word is followed by vowels.

A rvpIs Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening an inspiration for your work? Are you trying to create a meditative space?

LS I think about it more as a kind of tension. My latest record [*Heights in Depths*] has these two pieces with very different strategies: the first piece is about pure sound. In the second piece the same intervals get reused: chords and melodies come back. But I'm really interested in this feeling when you are listening to something as music: you're following the harmony and the melody, but all of a sudden there is something about it where its aspect as pure sound comes out. So it's this tension between music as a kind of construct and then hearing this as pure sound, which is similar to what happens to people who recite mantras or something like that. I'm after this feeling of the uncanny: "Oh, that is still an accordion" (*Laughs*).

A rvpIs this where the connection with mysticism comes from? Since your album *Heights in Depths* takes its name from a mystic text.

LS It's a funny text, and it's a difficult one to read because there are many layers of meaning. Originally I came to it from *A Revolution of Everyday Life* by Raoul Vaneigem, the situationist-international. He got it from Norman Cohn's book *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. Cohn's book is about all these medieval heretical movements, which are kind of anarchist movements.

This is a time before there was any atheist materialism, so this kind of criticism of the church was phrased

I am very careful about choosing the right consonants, vowels that may follow, and what kind of pitch I want at the moment and which part of my mouth, tongue I want to use to produce the sound with. Lyrics take a great role in that, too, but phonetics are also crucial to me.

JF On your latest album you come up with a reinterpretation of the traditional Japanese song *Kurokami*. Is your home country and its traditions important to your music?

KH I'm sure I have something Japanese in me, and that was actually part of the reasons why I decided to come back in '98 after spending 10 years in the States. I picked up the Japanese traditional dance for some years and studied koto and shamisen. But speaking of *Karokami*, I was really intrigued by its lyrics. As with many other songs, I twist and warp things around until the tune takes up a different form. That doesn't mean that I have no respect for the the originals. I just want to digest them until I really feel them in my stomach without memorising them and let them out of my system or let the lyrics lead me to somewhere.

JF How do you see yourself and your music in the context of the Eastern Daze festival's theme of establishing a connection between Western and non-Western music?

KH I am seeking a universal language where people don't give a thing about which languages I am singing in and feel the depth of that, and I don't like having concrete ideas. I want to be surprised. I also want the audience to feel nowhere and be confused, but feel the truth for themselves and the nothingness in it. Accepting and freeing from ordinariness, framework, stability, even from your own. I will perform with bassist Luis Inage, who has been supporting me for a few years. He is also on the *Between Dream and Haze* album. We have never done any shows outside of Japan, so that might be something to look forward to.



as a direct mystical experience: there is no authority but yourself. Before the 19th century this was necessarily coming out of a private mystical experience. *Heights in Depths and Depths in Heights* comes from the English civil war and was written as an apology, a sort of "I'm sorry but not sorry": it is him recanting his heresy for the church of England. After he spent years in prison during the war writing these mystical texts, the writer actually ended up becoming a middle class doctor. It is this "I prophesied but I don't prophesy anymore, but this is what I saw." The text is about how... Well, I don't know what is it about, but it is narrating an experience of the unity of all things. So, it is coming from a single point in seeing how all difference radiates from this one point.

In a way the A-side is like this one, the unity, and *Depths in Heights*, the B-side, is the diversity, when you see the world when you come back down from this experience. It's also cool, since in a way it is a forerunner to Pauline Oliveros' practice.


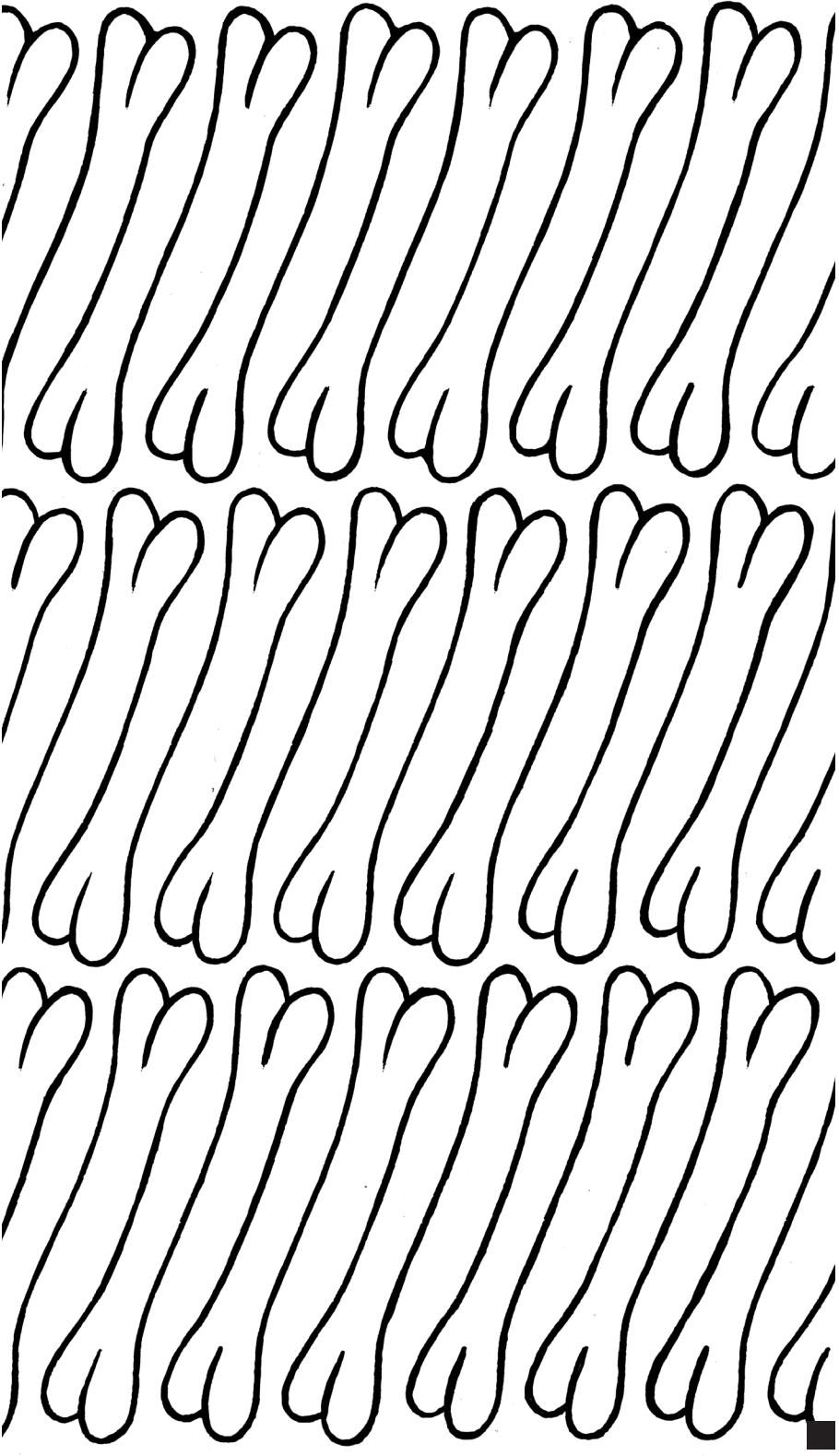
SUSAN ALCORN

11 QUESTIONS FOR SUSAN ALCORN: Mostly, people associate the pedal steel with cowboy music. Not here at the KRAAK office, especially because we are big admirers of the Baltimore based Susan Alcorn, pedal steelist pur sang. She grew up playing country & western and alike, but became very soonish interested in free jazz, raga, contemporary classical music and deep listening practices. Alcorn is an open minded, true researcher of sound; the lap steel, with its endless possibilities is – despite its connotations – for her foremost a natural tool to pursue a new universe of sound.

Inge van den Kroonenberg

- IK In your article *Texas: Three Days and Two Nights* which later was published as *The Road, The Radio and The Full Moon* you describe your experiences as a pedal steel player in the vivid but also conservative spirit of the country music scene in Texas. How do you look back on this period today and how did it shape you as a musician?
- SA Well, one thing it taught me was how to watch my back in certain situations. I guess what I remember about that time was that the music seemed so very alive. Within a structurally limited framework, there were some really good musicians playing with honesty, conviction, and taste. I think perhaps what it taught me musically was to get to the point, to be able to say something meaningful with few notes and to allow each note to tell its own story. Simple and direct. I have great affection for what is at the heart country music and great respect for its musicians.
- IK When did you start to grow out of this traditional music to explore more experimental genres like jazz and improvised music? Or was that something that has always been a side track?
- SA It was always there. I've always had an ear for things that were... different. When I was starting out, I didn't think there'd be much interest in some of the music I wanted to play, and I needed to improve my technique on the pedal steel guitar. In 1997, I think, I was invited to play at a performance space in Houston, Texas for a series called *12 Minutes Max* in which you could do anything you wanted as long as it was under twelve minutes. I told myself that I wasn't going to prepare any music or even think of ideas; I would just sit there in front of an audience and play whatever seemed appropriate. And that was quite a watershed. There was no place to hide – not behind a written score, form, or other musicians – just me and the audience. In a way it was like being naked, but it was liberating, and that night informs everything I've done since.
- IK Somewhere you mention an anecdote of you as a young child playing with the pedals underneath the piano while your mother was playing. A very intuitive and physical but also intimate connection to sound and instrument. Can you relate these early experiences in sound and music to your later explorations on the pedal steel guitar?
- SA Hmm, I've never thought about that. Perhaps that's why I've always had a physical feeling about music – I want something that will relate to the heart and the soul, but also something you can sort of feel in your bones.
- IK You are influenced by the compositions of Olivier Messiaen and Messiaen was fascinated by birdsong. Do you have a favorite birdsong? Are there other sounds in nature you like to listen to?
- SA I love Messiaen's birdsong, but what attracted me to him, more than

- that in many ways, was his approach to harmony, tempo, and orchestration. My favorite birdsong is probably the dove because there are mourning doves that congregate every day by my front door. Other sounds in nature I like – rushing water, especially over rocks. Sometimes I like the sound of rain or the silence after a heavy snow. I like wind rustling through the trees. And I like many sort of random sounds that are connected to this Anthropocene epoch we are now living in.
- IK How did you become connected with Pauline Oliveros and her Deep Listening music? In what way did it help you to grow in your practice as a composer and free improvisor?
- SA I first met Pauline in 1990 when I attended her first Deep Listening retreat on Rose Mountain in northern New Mexico. She was from Houston, where I was living then, and where I had lived for many years, so there was a connection. My two daughters took piano lessons from Pauline's mother Edith Gutierrez. The Deep Listening approach to music had a profound effect on the way I saw music. It taught me to listen to the tiniest things, the most subtle sounds, to respect and *play* the space where I was. With my music, there was definitely a *before* and *after* with Deep Listening.
- IK For your album *Soledad* you patiently spun out the Tango compositions of Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla who played the bandoneon, an oversized accordion. Was it difficult to translate the emotional expression of Tango to the pedal steel guitar and did it change your relationship with your instrument?
- SA To me the emotional expression of Piazzolla's tango came natural, because I identified with that feeling. The bandoneon and the pedal steel guitar have a lot of similarities – both can sustain notes, and both have *lungs*, both breathe into the music (and occasionally need to come up for air) – the bandoneon with its bellows and the pedal steel guitar with its volume pedal. I think that every new thing you play in some way changes your relationship with your instrument, and Piazzolla is no exception.
- IK Which piece of music opened your ears? When was that and why did it affect you so much at that moment?
- SA There were several piece of music that really *opened* my ears, affected me greatly, and perhaps changed my approach to creating music. I remember the first time I heard Edgard Varese's *Ameriques* – I was in my early teens. When I first heard John Coltrane in maybe 1967 or 68, *Invocation to Om* – that was quite an eye-opener, and it opened me to another world of possibilities. The same thing happened when I first heard Ornette Coleman's *Lonely Woman*. Seeing Astor Piazzolla live left a deep impression. Olivier Messiaen's *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum* affected me too. Another one, more personal, was hearing the

- great pedal steel guitar master Buddy Emmons's *black* album – there I heard the beauty, the purity, and the endless possibilities of the instrument I now play.
- I think the link between all of these is that I had a very visceral reaction to all of these, an almost physical process of awakening something inside of myself, pointing me in all sorts of new directions.
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- IK You have explored and mastered a great range of musical styles on your instrument. Is improvising with other musicians a way to blend and transform these styles into other, more idiosyncratic forms?
- SA Though I don't think I have truly mastered anything, I guess in some ways, you are what you eat. Historically, many, if not most, improvising musicians have varied backgrounds, some because they grew up with a certain kind of music, because we were really into a genre for a while, because they had to play various styles at times to make a living with their music. And also, some people have a deep affinity for a lot of kinds of music. With everyone, myself included, perhaps these are
- ingredients that go into that great pot of improvisational stew.
- IK Are there differences in playing free improv with European musicians compared to playing with musicians from the USA?
- SA I think at one time that was true, but now I don't hear it as much, especially from younger musicians. There is so much music available at the click of a mouse that we exposed to everything. Sometimes I think that many of the European musicians have better training than American musicians, but I could be wrong. I think the differences are not so much between continents as between individual musicians.
- IK What is your favorite recording setting?
- SA With some recording sessions there's this attitude of "Let's go for it." I find these quite refreshing. I like recording at home too – there's a sort of silence and an interior feeling when I play through headphones, alone, often late at night or just before dawn.
- IK On which project are you currently working on?
- SA Right now I'm writing music to record a solo album. California saxophonist Phillip Greenlief and I recorded an album three months ago that, I think, came out really well. Phillip is a musician with quite an amazing ear. And next week I'll be recording an album with Joe McPhee and Ken Vandermark – I'm really excited about that one. Also, I've been touring, mostly solo, a lot in the US and performing with the Mary Halvorson Octet. And the future? Who knows.
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■ AFEWORK NIGUSSIE ■

CONTEMPORARY AZMARI: AfeWORK Nigussie is an Ethiopian musician and singer from the Gondar region in North Ethiopia, who grew up in the capital Addis Abeba. He is a master of the masinko, a claret shaped violin with thick snares and goat skin which gives a strong sound that trembles into your belly and bones. He also plays a wide range of traditional Ethiopian string, wind and percussive instruments. His musical background is that of the ancient Azmari tradition, the wandering minstrels who carried the latest news and social criticism in loud songs from village to village, from door to door. Yet in his case, he chooses not to copy the old Azmari lines, but rather recreate his own songs that belong to current times, whether in secular or spiritual folk styles. Nigussie is a contemporary songwriter and composer who prefers to look forward instead of back.

Since several years, Nigussie lives in Rotterdam, a city with a blooming Ethiopian and Eritrean community. Over the years he has collaborated with Ethiopian jazz greats such as Mulatu Astatke and Getatchew Mekuria and with Dutch punkband The Ex. If not playing solo, he often plays as a duo with Arnold de Boer, better known as Zea, or in an all-African lineup of The Nile Project. We had a quick chat about his music, life and upcoming performance.

Seb Bassleer

SB At what age did you start playing the masinko violin and why did you pick this instrument?
AN I love the masinko as it was the best instrument to take. I studied music from 13 years old and I started playing the masinko when I was 16. I learned it through a friend and then developed it further by playing, time and experience.

SB Can you tell us about your path of the Azmari?
AN In old times, being an Azmari meant you could just not only be a masinko player. *Azmer* means *art*, *ri* means *owner* in the old Ethiopian Gize language and there also is a town called Azimar where musicians worked like journalists, bringing the news from door to door in songs. But I am not

A this kind of Azmari, I am just a musician who is making his own music as a songwriter and performer.

SB In Ethiopia and your home region of Gondar you are a quite well known artist in the modern folk scene. What was the reason that you moved away from Ethiopia?

AN When I was young, I felt bored in Gondar but I actually grew up in Addis Ababa because of my family who moved there for work. I don't think it's important to explain why I moved to the Netherlands but there is a big Ethiopian community there.

SB Do you often play for the Ethiopian community in the Netherlands at cultural events or religious celebrations?

AN Yes, but I don't just play Azmari music, but a big variety of Ethiopian music styles, such as Shilela, Fukera, Lekiso, Zimare, Wireba, Shibsheba, Eskista, Tizita, Anchihoie, Ambasel, Bati and so on. Each style is very different, has a different purpose and meaning.

SB Would you say your music is shaped by the original tradition, or rather by the here-and-now of the moment?

AN Yes it's traditional shaped but let me tell you something. As long as I am in Ethiopian tuning I am traditional. Even if you wish to play modern jazzy (except blues), you will stay in tradition because of the pentatonic scales which lead you.

SB How is cultural life in Ethiopia right now?

AN It's hard to say something now about Ethiopian cultural life because which angle? It's a poor life because at the moment there are no strong cultural music institutes in Ethiopia, it is just survival for all musicians.



SB As with many special artists from Ethiopia, Dutch punkband The Ex and Zea (Arnold de Boer) took interest in you, what has become of this and in what way has it influenced your own music?

AN You know, we are musicians for music. There are no borders, music is one of best to break borders, that's why (laughs).

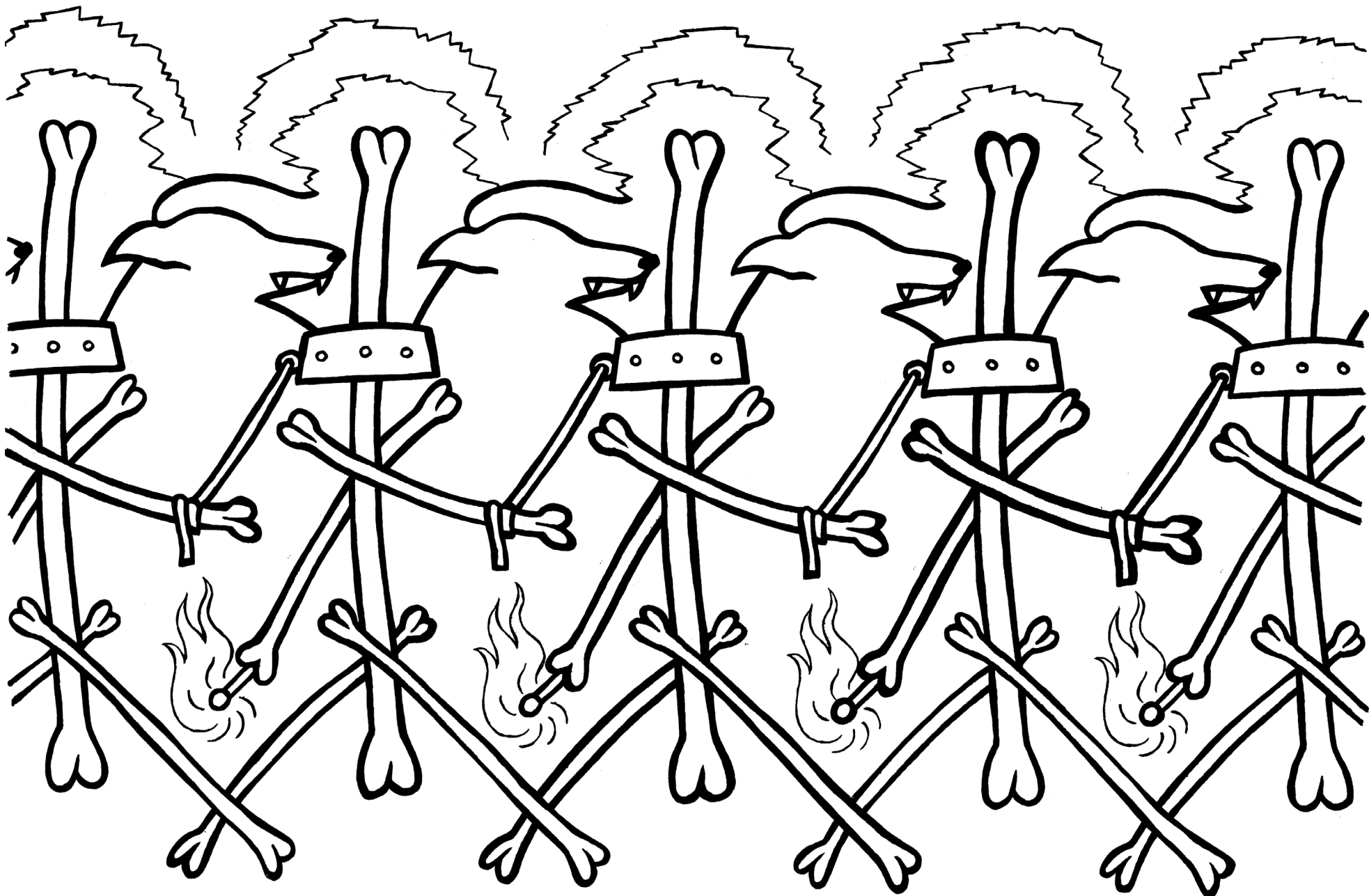
SB You also play in The Nile Project, with musicians from all of the countries where the Nile flows. What can you tell us about this project and your input?

AN It's true, The Nile Project is one of best bands with African musicians that I have ever participated in as music arranger as well as singer. I hope that I will spend much more time with them.

SB What do you expect from your solo set at Eastern Daze festival, what will you sing about? We are already looking forward.

AN I will playing some old and new cultural material. To be honest I never expect what kind of audience is coming to my performance, we will just meet there and then. enjoy, music is love.

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■ ANDREW PEKLER The Berlin-based Andrew Pekler delves deeply into playful loop-based electronic exotica. His most recent record is an homage to the legendary anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and his book *Tristes Tropiques*. The record is a sonic journey, composed out of fragments of music made by imaginary tribes. It displays a deeply nostalgic longing of a researcher who is confronted by the big questions about himself and his culture, as he becomes aware that the great enlightened stories are just one of the many truths. An interview without questions on identity, a book, internal logics and wordplays.

Niels Latomme

On Identity
I checked out the Eastern Daze line-up. I'm a big fan of Susan Alcorn, and a big fan of pedal steel guitar in general. Especially of people who use it with different kinds of techniques and in non-country contexts. But, I see **UK** written next to my name, which is funny. I'm not British, I've never lived in the UK. But in the context of *Tristes Tropiques* and the festival, I guess it's a good question where I'm coming from (*laughs*).

I've spent most years of my life in Germany now, although I wasn't born here. I grew up in the States, but I wasn't born there either, but in the Soviet-Union. I'm not Russian either, so you shouldn't put RU there, because I have an American passport, and I have a German permanent resident status... My own personal biography and that of my immediate family leads me to conclusion that these – at least as far as national identities, or those connected to territory or language, or a political entity – are illusions, accidents of history. I was born in the Soviet Union, in the region that is now Uzbekistan, and so was my sister. We both became naturalized American citizens, when we moved. In my passport it says "country of birth: Uzbekistan", my sister's says "Russia". The bureaucrat making up the passport thought "Ok, USSR... what is this, it no longer exists, what is then its successor state – it's Russia", although she never was citizen of Russia, but of the USSR. Our country of birth becomes just a banal accident. Ultimately, the notion of nationality is in the best case meaningless, in the worst case its very harmful.

I can go on, my father for instance is Jewish, he is not religiously so, even from the question if Jewishness is an ethnic entity, or a cultural, or a religious, seventy years ago in Germany I would have been half-Jewish. That is, Jewish enough for Auschwitz, to put it crassly. But for the State of Israël I am not Jewish enough to apply for citizenship [because Israel relies on the traditional religious definition of Jewishness as determined matrilineally]. These things are kind of arbitrary... Identity is, in every sense, too fluid and contingent to think of it as something permanent or concrete. For me, my socialization, and the kind of *milieu* in which I was brought up is much more significant. My identity is the formal and informal education, and my experience in life. I have certain ties to certain places, because I lived there, but I have no allegiances to any piece of land. So you can put UZ, RU, US or whatever, or maybe you can use NA, i.e. non applicable, or something?

On Tristes Tropiques
Claude Lévi-Strauss' book *Tristes Tropiques* inspired me first and foremost because it's a brilliant book. It's an interesting and fascinating text on different levels: you can read it like a novel, a travelogue, an autobiography, or like a philosophical treatise. Of course it's also Lévi-Strauss setting out the basic ideas of his structuralist anthropologist theories. From what



I understand, those – in the exact way Strauss has put them – are no longer really relevant in anthropological sciences. Ethnographers don't use his ideas anymore to describe how thought is structured in a society and how that affects how a village is physically set up, and how the relations between different groups in a society are set up... People don't take those ideas of his so literally anymore.

But, he was among the first anthropologists to question empiricism itself, and among the first who was critical about Western scientific thought in general; and about what the so-called civilized West does to the rest of the world. It was the beginning of post-colonial thought.

I hadn't read the book until a few years ago, and it really fascinated me. Also in a very banal sense it has a very beautiful and evocative title, so in this very small way I wanted to use it and I thought maybe some people would discover the book through the record.

In another sense, what I took from the book and applied directly to the music developed kind of in parallel. At the time of reading the book, I was trying out these kind of structural musical ideas about mirroring and double symmetry. Basically I took field recordings and processed them in such a way as to make them sound synthetic, and vice versa. I tried to make synthesized sound appear to be organic, natural, acoustic, etc.. I took two opposites and transformed them into each other. But also at the same time I left it slightly open, so that it always remains a bit uncertain what what is.

Symmetry and mirrors, and symmetrical structures come up again and again in the book. Making the music with this idea in mind, with this kind of formal constraint in mind, that was a good enough connection to use the title. There's not really more to it than that...

Towards Internal logic

It interests me most when both the content and form of a work are artfully manipulated. That is the thing that gets me going. I cannot just *jazz*. I always need an idea, even if it is a really abstract idea, to work around. Some formal constraint is essential for me to start. Often, it starts with a kind of joke, and I play with it to see how far that can be taken – literally.

For instance, I did that for the album that was called **Gover Versions**. It started with the words in the title. As a lifelong record buyer and having worked often in record shops, I quite like the vinyl LP as an

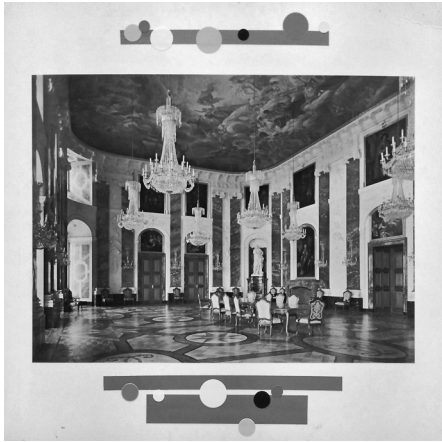
object, and I was always fascinated by the non-musical aspects of records – the design, the variations in print quality from different eras and regions, the liner notes, etc. You know the pre-internet feeling of being fascinated by something just because of the cover, without any other information.

I wanted to incorporate these non-musical aspects into a musical context so I did a 300 copy limited run, in which every vinyl had a different cover. To get these, I went around second hand shops and thrift stores and just bought records of which I liked the covers as cheaply as possible. Of course it became a collection of mainly light classical, light pop music and *Volksmusik* records – as you find them everywhere in Eastern Germany and Berlin. I started cataloguing the records by the type of cover, in which I quickly found a few motifs that kept repeating. Landscape photographs, still lifes – like a floral arrangements –, seascapes, and a few were purely abstract... My favorite was the motif of couples, mostly in silhouette on the beach. I covered up any text that was on these second-hand covers I was using with colourful stickers. So all the covers had that in common. The music itself was made out of random samples from these records which I used as the basic material to make the tracks – so a parallel constraint on the level of sound.

For the presentation, I converted an art gallery here in Berlin into a record shop for a few weeks, and sorted the records per motif – instead of by genre. That was how I could take the idea of the phrase **Gover Versions** as far as possible, that was my most thorough exploration of a formal constraint, so far.

Back to Lévi-Strauss

In a structuralist sense, you could say that for the **Govers Versions**, and also for other music and projects, I deconstruct the relation between sign and signifier. Although I never have been sure what precisely is meant by **deconstruction**. Or maybe it's no longer such a useful term anymore. We're so used nowadays to a context where everything is so information-dense, that it's either impossible to deconstruct anything, because the structure usually provides so much context, that it's hard to put it in another context. 50, 60 years ago, when *meaning* was more fixed, it might have been possible... basically when everyone agreed on what the rules are, it's possible to circumvent the rules, and that would be the act of deconstruction.



Maybe I'm missing something, but I'd rather make work that is a closed system in itself, with a certain internal logic – however simple or banal. It can point to things outside itself – if you see the covers of **Gover Versions**, it perhaps makes you aware of the fact that, the way in which an artifact is packaged, influences how you hear it. The installation was a record shop with 300 copies of the same album, each with a different cover. People came in, and browsed the copies, as if they are each a different album. They kept

picking each record up and turning it over, although the backside was the same. Like in a regular record shop, people flip through them and pull out one that they find appealing. So people find themselves doing this absurd thing, maybe in a way that points to behaviour and mechanisms that are outside the internal logic of the music. What I think I do for every record, is building this internal and aesthetic logic that is coherent in itself... But that sounds terribly pretentious, no?

On Anthropology

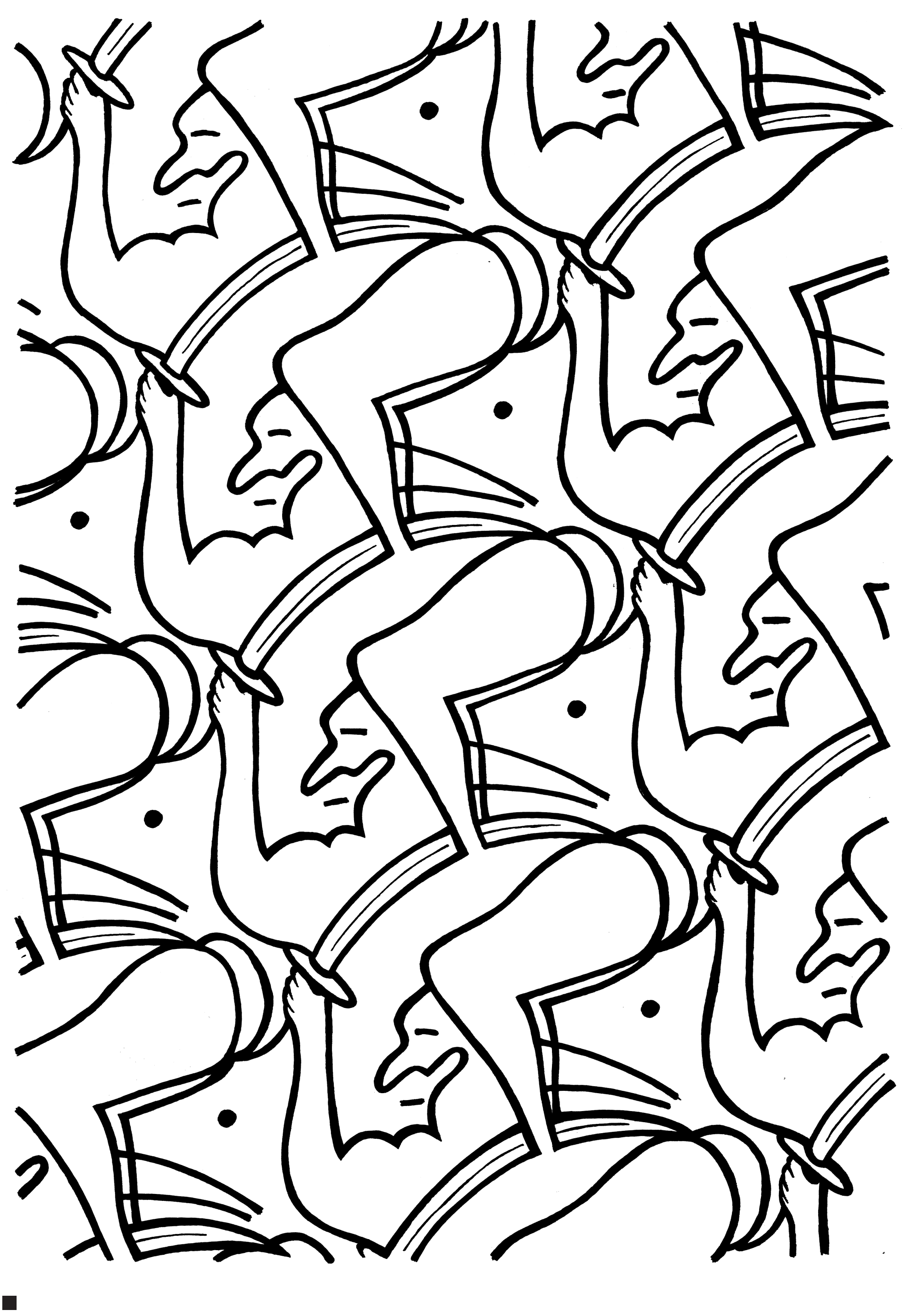
I realize that with my most recent album, I touch upon what Yannick Dauby, Lieven Martens and Spencer Clark are working on, which is a kind of musical anthropology and ethnography. It's certainly an attractive field of associations. Maybe it's because those fields of science are strongly associated with these romantic narratives of discovery of unknown, mysterious worlds, and on the other hand this idea of nobility and purity of people *unspoiled* by civilization that adds some kind of extra quality.

I guess ultimately, the idea of music influenced by anthropology or ethnography is a kind of engagement with the world through (paradoxically) an escapist fantasy. That's what it is for me anyway – through music I want to be taken to this other plausible world. I'm not purporting that the music I made is from a particular real place or society, but I want the fantasy to feel real – not **realistic**, but real like a dream feels real.

On the universal language

Alessandro Bossetti published an interesting book called African Feedback, which collects the reactions of people he meets travelling in Africa, for whom he plays some classics of the European, Western avant-garde canon. He asks them to comment on those pieces and it's quite interesting to read how people with little prior knowledge of the constructs being deconstructed, in the pieces react to them.

I think it's interesting how musicians like Afework Negussi see that music is some sort of a universal language idea... But I have a bit of problem with the metaphor. I think in some way that it's right, but then you'd have to add that music is a universal language in the specific sense that all cultures have music, which means you can recognize something as music, however that doesn't mean that you understand it in the same way you understand the music that you've grown up with. I observe this in myself when I'm listening to ethnographic recordings. I can't honestly say I understand let's say Malawian music in the same way I understand an American pop song. I can hear the vocabulary but I don't understand the grammar of it. That is, I perceive the content, but at least initially, I can only vaguely grasp the rules being used (or ignored) that determine which form it takes. And what actually happens is that I superimpose my own previous experiences of how music is put together (the grammar I am familiar with) onto this material. The good thing though is that this doesn't make my listening experience any less pleasurable or interesting. In fact, for me the pleasure is often in these moments of superimposition. So yeah, that's why I always question this metaphor of music as a universal language – it's certainly universal but I don't believe everyone *understands* every instance of music in the same way. Of course, you can quickly familiarize yourself and learn a new language, but still it's very hard to become fluent, knowing all the nuances.



eastern quarter issue