

TITLE

Why does one call a CD 'A Rainy Koran Verse'? I originally gave the title to the close-up photo of a trash container in Haarlem, The Netherlands that had caught my attention because of the rust streaks on it looking so much like calligraphy, its colours, and the raindrops on it. The 'calligraphy' unfolds from right to left so that the association with Arabic calligraphy was kind of inevitable, and the title presented itself to my mind.

While thinking about a possible title for +minus' live CD it intuitively occurred to me that 'A Rainy Koran Verse' was a somehow perfect title for it (like it had intuitively occurred to me that the photo would somehow be perfect for the cover artwork - the image is not 100% sharp, but I believe there's more to photography than technical perfection). My friends agreed to using both photo and title, and now we all hope the CD won't be banned in the USA (hopefully just kidding).

EVOLUTION

Our trio +minus has much evolved in two aspects since we recorded our first album together: in terms of our playing together we have come to a kind of mutual trust that enables us to completely rely on each other, making moments when only two, one, or none of us are playing possible. By the time we had made it to London on our tour I sometimes found myself only mixing the basis track, like I do for my electro acoustic music concerts, or using the cello only to give a slightly different tone colour to the basis track. Graham had managed to find his way into what I call the cello's 'resonant system' revolving around C, F, and A, somewhat like a Cmaj6 (sus4) chord - not the most comfortable environment for an E-flat alto whose natural resonances are used to create feedback - and Mark's decision to concentrate on pitched sound enriched the harmonic density of our music.

Anybody familiar with improvising music knows that musicians are very concerned not to let the musical thread snap, so that musicians not yet familiar with each other may tend to continuously play and take less risks in their playing. +minus turned out to work very nicely in this respect right from our first meeting, and our playing together has since evolved continuously - a fact that I find quite amazing, given that my friends and I are geographically separated by the strip of water between the European mainland and England, and that soundchecks have been our only rehearsals together. I'm very happy being a member of a group that feels like a living, growing thing, isn't afraid of neither consonance, dissonance, and non-pitched noise sounds, and has developed its own musical vocabulary.

On the 'material world' side +minus has changed as Mark decided that his 'amplified textures' were redundant because of our using my composed basis tracks, and dropped them to concentrate on his instruments. He added a Tam Tam (a kind of flat gong) and a snare drum to his Nepalese prayer bowls and bell. Frustrated having to use just any old amplifier found at a location for my electric cello (along with my microphone) I invested in a small Tapco mixing board, which turned out to be one of the best investments of my musical life, and devised a great sounding amplification set-up for the instrument.

After having some technical problems with the PA system at the Archipel Festival in Geneva, Switzerland, we also decided to not use house PA systems any more - Graham and I are now playing through small stereo systems, while Mark does not use any amplification at all. These decisions have much (and very positively, too) influenced the music you hear on this album.

TOUR DATES

Thur 27th May

Other Sounds

King Of Hearts Centre,

Norwich

(plus cello and electronics from Anton Lukoszevieve)

Fri 28th

The Termite Club,

Holy Trinity Church,

Leeds

(plus sound installation from Lee Patterson)

Sat 29th May

The Great Hall,

University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST),

Manchester,

(plus sound installation from Lee Patterson & Benjamin Gwilliam)

Sun 30th May

Field

Chisenhale Dance Space

London

(plus electronics and video from Matt Davis, Ben Lancaster & Rob Flint)

THE RECORDINGS

The three tracks on the album consist of the complete concert in Norwich and excerpts of the concerts in Manchester and London. The selection I chose and proposed to my friends is intended to illustrate how +minus functions in different spaces and moments. All concerts were structured following the same pattern: a + piece (i.e. with a basis track) a minus piece (i.e., sans basis track), and ending with another + piece. On the CD you thus hear each basis track twice, and also two variations of the minus part based on chordal playing from the cellotar. Nevertheless the three pieces are quite different.

Tracks two and three are blended into each another, creating one continuous piece, but do have individual track numbers. The concert in Leeds was also recorded, and a musically very nice concert, but we chose to not use the recording because of the large amount of unwanted sonic intrusions from creaking benches and passing cars - too much to get rid of by editing the recording.

The basis tracks used are 'Impossible Grey' (released by METAMKINE as a part of their Cinéma pour l'oreille series) and 'Untitled II/92', taken from my album 'Un Peu de Neige Salie'. I edited the recordings only in terms of choosing the parts to use and deleting disturbing non-related noises - everything you hear was played as presented on the CD. I recorded the Norwich concert by means of my Sony MiniDisc Walkman and my small Sony Microphone - it sounded fine, but does of course not entirely match the recording quality of the other concerts recorded to professional grade DAT recorders with much better microphones. I did my best to make the recording sound good when mastering, and think that my remark about photography and technical perfection nicely applies to this matter, too.

THE FUTURE

Since the future tends to be a rather long time I am limiting myself to the near future of +minus. We are planning to record our second studio album by the end of this year, and, believing in keeping our trio open to collaboration with guest artists, have invited two artists to take part in the project: my long-time partner in crime Steve Roden will create a basis track for us, and Shakuhachi player Clive Bell has kindly accepted our offer to sit in with us for one piece. Mark is working on a piece that will feature a basis track of Tam Tam sounds and Mark playing double bass, while I will provide another basis track. Plenty of new adventures are lying ahead of us, and I'm really looking forward to the experience!

Bernhard Günter, September 2004

:: MARK WASTELL :: A TOUR DIARY ::

THURSDAY 27TH MAY

12 mid-day - I leave London in our tour vehicle, a borrowed Renault Espace, plenty of room for the three of us and our equipment. I've made the journey to The Old School many times and anticipate a two hour trip. The Old School is Graham's studio space, this is where he and Bernhard have been rehearsing and testing out the touring sound systems over the last couple of days. As I drive I listen to Beggars Banquet (The Rolling Stones), Time Travel (Otomo Yoshihide & Gunter Muller), and a recording of a concert Rhodri Davies and I gave at Huddersfield University a few weeks previously.

2.30pm - Arrival at The Old School. Graham and Bernhard arrive about five minutes later. We chat and have tea and begin to load the equipment. Just a short journey ahead of us to the venue in Norwich.

3.00pm - Arrival at The King of Hearts, a lovely fully restored Tudor music room, all exposed beams and sloping wooden floors. We have plenty of time for our first soundcheck together and prepare our equipment accordingly. I feel a little guilty as I only have a Tam Tam and a number of prayer bowls to set up whereas Graham and Bernhard have amps, mixers, cd player, speakers and yards of cables to wrestle with. Our first soundcheck reveals the need to rearrange speaker placements. This complete, we soundcheck with the basis tracks to set volume levels and play through the complete version of Impossible Grey a number of times.

6.00pm - We break for food, a Thai meal that Meg, Graham's wife, has arranged.

7.30pm - The audience has arrived and our concert starts. The room reveals its hidden beauty as we begin to play and settle ourselves into the soundscape. Small details have such presence. The electronic sounds are crisp and light. Graham's feedback weaves its way into every corner of the room. Bernhard has set up his mini-disc and microphone to record the concert, I hope he remembered to press the record button.

9.30pm - Concert complete. We strike the equipment and load the vehicle, the plan is to return to Graham's house immediately and relax. A long drive ahead tomorrow. Post-concert talk amongst ourselves is positive, we all enjoyed the performance, no technical hitches. All is well. Red wine, cheese and bread. Tea and strong Badger Ale from Norfolk.

FRIDAY 28TH MAY

10am - Fortified with good black coffee and croissants we load the Espace with our gear and hit the road to Leeds. With stops along the way it'll take about six hours. Graham is riding shotgun and helping with navigation, Bernhard in the back sightseeing. A couple of hours into the journey we stop for tea and egg rolls at a typical British roadside cafe Bernhard is less than impressed with the traditional grease flavoured fare on offer and settles instead for chocolate.

4pm - We make good time and hit Leeds early. Wayne Spencer, the promoter, has arranged to meet us at the venue, a large, looming, grey stoned church in the city centre at 4.30pm. Graham asks inside for unloading access and on his return to the vehicle runs into a West Yorkshire greeting party made up of about a dozen teenagers, who promptly threaten to fight him when he asks them to move aside so we can drive the van down the side passage. Thank heavens for the little lady care-taker who saved the day, telling the spotty herberts to clear off out of it. The church itself is enormous, a cavernous space with a vast high ceiling. We begin to set up in the altar area, tables and chairs are placed in location and speakers mounted on stands. Contrary to the size of the church, the altar area is fairly cramped and we three have some difficulty in arranging ourselves and equipment appropriately. The soundcheck reveals some problems, the need for more volume than in Norwich is apparent and our group sound is clouding up above our heads in the ceiling space. Speakers are moved into different areas. We work on rectifying our concerns and after a couple of hours we think we have it nailed. Wayne and his wife Ann have generously supplied us with a Chinese meal, which we pounce on like the half starved men we are.

9pm - The venue has dramatically filled with people, a nice sized audience of about 70 people. We take to the stage and begin our performance. Just like last night's concert the format is to begin with a + section, segue into a minus section, and finish with a second + section. All parts run seamlessly into one another, no gaps or breaks. But tonight does not run as smoothly as we had hoped. Some five minutes into the piece Graham's signal from his right speaker is picked up by Bernhard's microphone and a circle of feedback begins. At first it is not too discernable from Graham's regular material but it eventually begins to overpower and flatten the saxophone feedback. We are alerted to the problem and quickly rectify it. Thankfully the whole sequence probably lasted no more than 90 seconds. The rest of the concert runs like a dream. Jamie Stephenson wrote on the Termite Club website "Tonight they play a beautiful long piece that takes root with pin sharp sine waves and bowed percussion, growing into a sparse yet elaborate improvisation of subtle shape-shifting ambience and the occasional crashing crescendo. The ripple of applause that follows proves that I am not alone in being bewitched by the trio." Video artist David Reid filmed the concert and made a DAT recording.

11pm - Concert over, post-gig pleasantries complete and equipment loaded. We're staying tonight with Stephen Becker, Termite Club regular and host extraordinaire. Conversation carries on until 3am, then to bed.

SATURDAY 28TH SEPTEMBER

9am - Could have done with a couple more hours sleep but today's concert in Manchester is a lunchtime performance. We're joined in the van by Lee Patterson, the Manchester promoter who also performed at the concert in Leeds and stayed the night with us at Stephen's. It's only an hour drive to Manchester and first stop is Lee's house to pick up some equipment. We get to the Great Hall at around 11am. The concert will start at 1pm so we have plenty of time to soundcheck. We all have some concern regards the feedback problem from last night but realise that it had manifested itself because, due to the cramped area we set up in, Graham had had no choice but to sit behind Bernhard and myself creating a triangle. We now know that a flat line formation is forever necessary and proceed to set up this way. The Great Hall is wood panelled with large stained glass

windows. It is certainly a beautiful space, our second large venue of the tour. It's also the main exam hall at the university and is full of hundreds of solitary exam tables with chairs. There was an initial idea to leave the tables in situ and have the audience sit at them but in the end a number are cleared away and a more traditional arch of seats are put in place. Our soundcheck goes very well, we're beginning to know exactly what needs to be done and are achieving the right results quicker through experience. We break for a lunch at about 12.30 just as one or two audience members begin to arrive.

1.30pm - Again the room has filled up and continues to do so during Lee and Benjamin's set. The size of the audience is the same as last night, maybe even a few more. Some of the audience were also at last night's show, and David Reid is also present again to film and record. Our set plays out perfectly, a really fine example of +minus music. The low rumble of the air conditioning system adds something to our sound at certain points. The concert concludes at about 3.30pm and there's much talk and socialising afterwards with the audience and friends. We begin the pack up and load up and I'm keen to get on the road by 6pm.

6pm - We journey back to Norwich, listening on the way to various cd's including the Ian Carr/Don Rendell Quintet, Anouar Brahem, 'Ahallil de Gourara', sacred songs from the Sahara and Lapland singer Marie Boine. It's more or less a six hour slog and we arrive at The Old School around midnight. We unload some equipment and I say good bye to Bernhard and Graham as I'm heading straight back to London. Arrived home at 2am.

SUNDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER

3pm - Graham and Bernhard arrive at my home in Winchmore Hill, north London and take a little tea and juice, a few olives, cheese and bread. We head off at just after 4pm for Chisenhale Dance Studio in Bethnal Green. When we arrive Matt Davis is already there and we again unload our kit up three flights of stairs to the performance space. The Dance Studio is a converted warehouse space, so is fairly large with brick walls, nice wooden floor and lowish ceiling. We choose to set up along the front wall. The set up and soundcheck is our quickest yet, start to finish about 40 minutes, we are turning into a tight drilled outfit. The concert is due to start at 7.30pm but come 7pm there is still no audience. Matt shows little concern, quite rightly, too, as over 80 or so people arrive in the following half hour. The audience is encouraged to spread out over the dance studio floor area, some lying down, as well as to use the staged seating platform at the back of the hall. We perform with the windows blacked out by heavy drapes, with just one lamp lit behind Bernhard as he needs to see the playback cd machine and his mixing board. There is a definite sense of tranquillity in our music tonight, as though we had reached a point of trust in one another through the previous three concerts, but the music is also full of new turns, we are pushing into new areas and actively moving into the next cycle. Rob Flint films the concert and Tim Fletcher makes a digital recording.

10pm - Concert and tour complete. We load up for the last time and head straight back to my place. Once we have unloaded we settle down to a post-tour conference over red wine. Jovial mood abounds, we're a happy group, secure in the knowledge that we have played some successful concerts. Then to business, money is divided, plane tickets and petrol costs accounted for, wages paid.

Someone jokingly suggests the possibility of releasing a live album of tour highlights ok, let's see what happens.

Mark Wastell, 9th September 2004



BERNHARD GÜNTER - ELECTRIC CELLOTAR



GRAHAM HALLIWELL - ALTO SAXOPHONE FEEDBACK



MARK WASTELL - TAM TAM, PRAYER BOWLS, SNARE DRUM, BELL



CLEY MARSHES, NORFOLK, ENGLAND (AS SEEN BY BERNHARD)