

ART



LETTER NO. 7  
MAY 2022

# THIS MONTH



We welcome rhythm wizard, drummer, composer and educator, Stephen Neville. Steve will be presenting a night of improvised music and poetry. He'll be joined by keyboardist Dave McEvoy, vocalist Lauren Henderson and visual artist Madeleine Larkin. Think Paul Motian in a bath with Yeats and Liszt. The poetry will be a selection of some of Steve's original writing, and music and visual art will be improvised live.

## CURATORS PICKS

**A Love Supreme**  
John Coltrane

**The Liebesträume Nocturnes**  
Franz Liszt

**Artist In Residence**  
Jason Moran

**Figure 8**  
Elliott Smith

**Maiden Voyage**  
Herbie Hancock

# EXCERPT FROM A LESSON WITH DRUMMER AND COMPOSER CHRISTIAN LILLINGER

Interviewed august 14 - 2021

**MILES:** With Dell Lillinger Westergaard, and Amok Amor - now Koma Saxo, on first listen to my ears it comes across as free improvisation, but when listening closer, I'm amazed by the precision. I want to know how you think about that music, and how you consider improvisation.



**CHRISTIAN:** for me, everything is based on articulation, even chaos. With Chaos, that means mostly you don't know what's happening, you just see the big picture of it, but then if you zoom in here and there, you can see the articulation in all the notes, and the relationship between different streams of notes, and i've always wanted to organise this chaos.

I've also wanted to play the sound (the big picture) The way i see it, it's all different layers, and you have to practice to see and hear all of them. For example you have a structure of four bars. And you have to be able to hear these four bars as one whole sound, the bars, or the individual

beats. Then you can start to divide the bars in other ways. With Dell Lillinger Westergaard, we practice these structures together and talk really hard about it. We might have a really polyphonic structure, then go in and learn every single voice by heart. We can say hey, you play bar 5, i play this bar then we mix it around into every single possible permutation, but we know what's going on the whole time. Then on top of that sometimes, we can play our own notes sometimes, but it has to be within that specific aesthetic, or energy.

**MILES:** Would you call that improvisation?

**CHRISTIAN:** Yeah of course, improvisation is the future in this sense. It's not like improvisation is like 'now we can play whatever' no no no. It is charged with knowledge. Christopher Dell is worth checking out. He talks about having Modus A of improvisation, which is born out of a lack. Like if you're cooking and you have not enough to make something nice, you take what you have and put it together in new ways. Then Modus B is that the constructive way is through chaos, in which case you have to know what's going on.

Let's say you play on the drumset and you get a lot of notes going on. It might not sound that good because you've got so many notes you don't even know what you're doing. Then slowly you try to organise it - ok what can i do here, let's repeat that - then you try to design it from outside the frame you were just creating in. For me, you always have to be able to zoom in and out at the same time. Sometimes you are the person who's playing it, and sometimes you are above yourself,

and you can see the whole picture, then slowly produce yourself, cut it up, reorganise it, whatever.

That's something that I do with Petter Eldh (Swedish bass player, producer and bandleader), a lot of stretchy stuff and risking from uptempo swing to different structures and so on - we jump in and out. First of all, we have known each other for a really long time, which is really important. There's no such thing as magic - it's bullshit. Sometimes you can play together, sometimes not. It's fine. It depends on the aesthetic and what you want to do or what your friends want to do. But if you really invest time together, it will meld. Then if you do not play together, you will have two really clear voices, which we call polyphony and this is great, because they are both intentional. This you can do on the drumset too - having four limbs means you can use them to get around many different layers simultaneously.

## Recommended listening from Christian

**Iannis Xenakis**

Eonta (1964)

**Pierre Boulez**

Piano Sonata no. 2 (1947-48)

**Morton Feldman**

Patterns in a chromatic field,  
part 1 (1981)

STEPHEN NEVILLE INTERVIEW

# IF IT GROWS IN THE GROUND, IT'S GOOD

## **What motivates you at the moment?**

People. Making people laugh, that's something that motivates me at the moment. Comedy and how words can change and impact people. That's kinda my main thing that I've been thinking about lately. In particular comedy. I've been checking out lots of stand ups, but also books and poetry.

With the wordy bits in the show on thursday (mud) one of the poems i've picked is a suite I wrote when i had covid. I woke up hallucinating and having fevers and wrote this suite called fever dreams. I have vague memories of writing it, but I woke up the next day and had these poems written on my phone that I'd written in the middle of the night. They're all about feeling sick and having covid, and covid as a general thing and its impact as well.

## **What are your favourite ways to go about creating?**

I think the voice is kind of intrinsic to all music, because it's the first instrument, so I love singing and having that just as a musical thing for fun and not part of work. As far as going about creating though, if I had an ethos, I always feel best when I feel like I've done enough work on my instrument (the drums) to be free in the moment. To not have any roadblocks in the way. When it comes to a group setting - not just talking about me on the drums or me writing or whatever, I just try to do whatever I can to help others in whatever ensemble I'm in just be in the moment and let whatever's happening in that moment be the guide. As opposed to having a preconceived notion as to what might happen.

### **Can you talk about the balance between improvisation and composition?**

Is improvisation even a thing? A conversation is improvised, but it's made up of words that we all know, constructed in the semantics that we all agree upon. In any improvisation, you need a framework to actually improvise in. I don't think improvisation can happen in a vacuum. Even the people that have tried to improvise in the most free and open way, like the purest form of improvisation, even that in itself becomes the framework. With jazz, if you're playing a standard then that's the framework and that's the tradition. It's the framework of the tune informed by tradition and agreed upon vibe, then within that there's the scope to improvise. Even with the creative improvisation thing, going into what we're doing next week (MUD) we've actually talked about it.

### **How are you using the history of the jazz tradition between when you play that style at the Grace Emily on Wednesdays compared to what you're going to be doing at MUD?**

Talking about the Grace, that's definitely informed by the tradition for sure. I'm just kind of doing my best to be myself with what I know about that tradition and be respectful of it, but also to create and have my own voice within that tradition. It's my role and what I love about being a musician. Going into this though (MUD) Even just talking to Madi just then (artist) what I kind of hope for this, with the visuals, the words and the music, they're three distinct and separate mediums but they all have equal footing and create one whole. I'm going into this with a completely different mindset and I'm not thinking of jazz at all. I'm just thinking music.

### **How does teaching and responding to the people you teach reflect in your playing and view of music?**

As I get older, and being a dad, realising I can't just drop things and tour the world, my goals and ambitions change. I realise that teaching, and this is something that's almost surprised me, has become super important to me and the way I got about my practice and study on the drums. Teaching's become almost as important a passion of mine as the drums themselves. I talk about what I know, but I also try to teach what I'm still learning and put that creative energy into it. With the students that are really passionate and into it, you get to explore things together and then it becomes not just a one way thing. You get to explore new parts of the drums together, then share that excitement and discovery. That's the thing that I love the most about practice. Even if it's not necessarily new but you're hitting on your weaknesses and developing them into strengths. Teaching at the uni has almost become as important to me as performing, which is surprising to me, because I always thought teaching was gonna be very much a secondary part of my life, but I love it and I couldn't imagine not doing it now. It totally informs my playing on the drums and my own practice. I kind of like how the lines are blurred. ■

SEPTEMBER 2022

# artist-in-residence program

HUMUS  
SUMNH

Applications  
open **May 9**

- **GENEROUS FUNDING FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER**
- **MENTORSHIP SESSIONS**
- **ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR ACCOMPANIMENT**
- **HI-RES AUDIO-VISUAL RECORDING OF EACH PERFORMANCE**

[MUDARTS.ORG](https://mudarts.org) TO FIND OUT MORE

APPLICATIONS CLOSE JUNE 13

We hold this space on the unceded  
land of the Kurna people.

We acknowledge them as the  
custodians of this wonderful place  
and will always try to do our work in  
solidarity with the anti-colonial struggle.

**ALWAYS WAS, ALWAYS WILL BE.**

We would like to thank Miles, Stephen, Dave,  
Lauren and Madeleine for their contributions  
to this months MUD

If you would like to contribute to the  
newsletter and the MUD community, email  
[mudmusicart@gmail.com](mailto:mudmusicart@gmail.com)

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