

Interview : Heddy Boubaker (2007)

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1. Have you got any formal musical training, and what do you draw from it now?

I'm mainly a self-taught musician - except for a few classes, I did learn all by myself. This made me a very bad instrumentalist – or at least one with a non-conventional technique - and a musician with many gaps... I learned only what I was interested in or what I needed to know and never took care of what bored me. I think of me as an insane sound manipulator rather than a Musician (with a big capital M).

2. What kind of equipment/instrument do you use, and what is your relationship towards it? What do you think lies behind your choice of the equipment/instrument ?

My main instrument is an alto saxophone, but I started in the mid 70s by using an electric guitar. I started guitar as a kid for mainly sexual reasons and switched lately to the saxophone because a girl friend lent me one and - at that time I was trying hard to play bebop jazz - succeeded easily to do with it what was hard for me to do with the guitar... I now feel really comfortable with the sax and use it more often as a tool to manipulate organic sounds from my body (breath, saliva, mouth noises, voice and so on) and that's the most interesting aspect of the instrument for me at the moment: the (non)-electro-acoustic controller/amplifier of organic-acoustic material. Since mid 2006 I started again to play the electric guitar but in a totally different way than I had for a long time, now more in a kind of a "post-Keith Rowe-ish" manner, this is the same approach for me to the instrument as with the sax (except for organic sounds) but with much more rock'n'roll in it.

3. What is it that attracts you towards musical experimentation ?

The freedom and depth of expression, the surprise, pleasure and stimulation of the unknown, the intellectual, emotional, sometimes spiritual, challenges and experiences, playing with odd sounds, odd forms, odd, unusual instruments, and often odd interesting nice people, the animal primitive cathartic organicity (?) of the material, the childish pleasure of constant discovery... and the list is far from finished.

4. Why are you involved in improvisation, and how do you perceive it?

I'm involved in it for all the reasons I cited above, that's my favorite artistic activity. In fact, that's only a simple continuity of life activity, of being human, at least when you feel a little bit of freedom in your mind.

5. How do you perceive the relation between planning and spontaneity in improvisation?

In the absolute there could not be any planning in my improvisation, only spontaneity, that's the theory; practically there is something that I will not call planning because there is the idea of making a project, of systematization behind this word, but this might better be named preparation, mental preparation, dealing with (non)-memory, trying to start with a large "*blank sheet of paper*" that's the only form of "*planning*"... But beyond that you have your human, simple, mortal, your

anguish, neurosis and so on to deal with...

6. Do you "practise" for an improvisation, and what are your general thoughts on the idea of "practising" for improvisation?

When you improvise, do you use sounds that you've already "tried out", and how much room is there for actual sound experimentation?

I regularly practice my instrument, in fact except for very few specific technical exercises, I mainly practice by improvising, just playing with no rules and sometimes trying to go deeply in such or such way in order to integrate something new for example.

When I improvise everything is open and everything can happen - this *blank sheet* effect - I do not search specifically for new sounds, I do not try to play such or such thing, what I play is oriented by what happens in the moment, in fact I found almost all the sounds by myself (that is, the ones which I didn't steal from others), and they were found during live improvisations and rarely during work at home, as I said before, I then work on them in depth at home to ameliorate/integrate them into my "*language*". I really enjoy these moments when you discover something new for yourself and try to develop/use it without really mastering it, this takes you to intense moments of pure improvisation and sometimes catastrophic interesting ugly sounds :)

7. How do you evaluate an improvisation? What is it, according to you, that makes one improvisation better than another?

This is a great mystery !!! If I'm involved in it, a "*good*" improvisation is one where I don't remember anything after it's finished :) Beyond that, this is often by listening again later to the recording that really this kind of appreciation develops; I can't name any precise points that make me decide what a good improv is for me (in fact, there are a few points that can make me judge what makes a NOT good improv in my eyes: lack of listening, not taking the environment in account, lack of involvement, the use of clichés ...) furthermore it really depends on the mood, the moment, the weather, the time of the day and so on, it is really a question of how I feel in relation to what I'm listening to. Previously, I mentioned anguish, neurosis, catastrophic ugly sounds, accidents, ... all these imperfections in the perfect theory of mastering the Art of Improvisation makes this practice much more interesting than its theory.

8. When you are recording for a release, does the awareness of being recorded influence your playing, and in what way?

There are two kinds of recording for a release: the recording of a live performance, that in fact is rarely planned to be for a release but for documentation generally and if the concert and the recordings were really good it could be used for a release. This kind of recordings do not change at all my playing, in fact in such a case I always forget that I'm being recorded. The second kind is recording in the studio, and here, yes there is clearly an influence on my playing, the only recordings of this kind I did were my solo recordings and even if they were all based on improvisations, each piece tended to concentrate on a specific point, or a set of specifics points, of my playing, in terms of concepts, aesthetics, technique and so on (sometimes many of these things mixed).