

Torben Tilly - interview by Chris Cudby

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Auckland-based artist/musician **Torben Tilly** wears a lot of hats - performing solo in his electronic project **Droszkhi**, exhibiting regularly in galleries around the country, composing soundtracks for film with Gavin Hipkins and is currently involved in a variety of musical groups including **Full Fucking Moon** and **Bad Statistics**. Tilly became well known in the sound art community for his involvement in Berlin-based electronic duo **Minit** and Wellington psychedelic free-rockers **The Garbage and The Flowers**. He generously took time out to answer a few questions in the leadup to his upcoming exhibition at the Audio Foundation 'Nobody But You'.

What are you planning for your upcoming exhibition at the Audio Foundation?

The exhibition 'Nobody But You' represents a distinct collection of works that have been made over the last twelve months. It weaves together ideas of synchronicity, time-travel and time-consciousness, and takes as its starting point two album covers – [John Cale's Slow Dazzle](#) (1975) and [Lou Reed's Street Hassle](#) (1978) – to suggest an impossible yet poetic portal of communication between two strangely symmetrical 'events' in musical history, an untimely collaboration if you like. All the individual works in the installation (including a cymbal that transmits its sound backwards via radio) are to be considered in conversation with each other, and as a whole address notions about the direction and perception of time, in particular the perception of what we might call 'the present moment'. In other words: it's the spatialisation of an event as a successive unfolding of time portrayed as a spatial simultaneity! The title of the show, by the way, comes from the song that Cale and Reed wrote together for their album Songs For Drella dedicated to the memory of Andy Warhol following his untoward death in 1987. This was their first collaboration since they had parted ways after the 1968 Velvet Underground record 'White Light/White Heat'.

You perform solo as Droszkhi, could you please talk about that project – what did you do with your show at Rising Tides Festival last year (next to the giant Christmas tree)?

Droszkhi is the name I gave myself when I began making music on my own twelve or so years ago. It is a bastard spelling of the Russian and Polish words for a low riding horse-drawn carriage. The Polish word is *dorożka*. The Russian word, *дрожки*, is particularly nice. I came across it when reading Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* many years ago. There is nothing particular Russian about the music I make, but at the time I liked the old-worldly image it conjures of getting from A to B, which, in the realm of 'electronic music' I related to my slightly old-fashioned and encumbered approach to technology. The music is predominantly but not strictly drone-based, and takes a sculptural approach to drone music by attempting to spatialise and pries open sounds in a way that enable other sonic spaces in-between to emerge, resulting in what I would hope is a kind of spectral or psychedelic effect/experience.

At the Rising Tides Festival in Wellington last December, I played a concert outdoors beneath the Telecom Christmas Tree at Waitangi Park, with a four-speaker surround set-up. I played at around dusk for about an hour-and-a-half to an audience that lay on their backs on beanbags staring up at the cascading light cone display. The piece I played was in homage to some of Terry Riley's early work, very cyclical and atmospheric. While I wasn't programming the music to be in time with the light patterns, nor were they triggered

by my sound, many people commented on how the light movement and shifting arrays of colour seemed to be completely in time with the music. This was nothing more than synchronicity.

Please talk about some of the various & previous projects you're involved in. Do you have different attitudes towards each one eg. do you play different roles or 'characters' in each project?

I have often worked collaboratively. If and when it is truly egalitarian, then what is produced collaboratively is naturally a net result of all those persons involved. I think all the projects I have been involved in each have their unique personality based on the people involved. Minit (with sound artist Jasmine Guffond) was a project that came about from a conscious decision to work within the realm of sampling, which for us encompassed the manipulation of recorded sound material and field recordings, and borrowed from methods from musique-concrete and dub-mixing techniques. Around 1996/97 we heard Oval's Systemisch and Diskont '94 as well as Microstoria's Init Ding all of which had quite an influence on us and in many ways was the trigger for the start of our collaboration as Minit. Even though sampling had been around since the early days of rap and house music, it was the micro-sound worlds of this music and many others being made around this time that opened up a whole new approach not only to the nature of how music was made, but how it was listened to in the act of making it. Such methods enabled a criticality and 'deconstructivism' that meant one could be an audience of one's own music. 'Deep listening', if you like. I think this was a natural progression as a visual artist coming to consider the materiality of sound and to think of sound and music sculpturally.

While Minit was essentially quite minimalist in its ideas and form, Full Fucking Moon (with Bek Coogan, Andy Wright, Steve Heather), by contrast, embodies a radical kind of 'fusion'. This musical fusion expands outwards to include performance as a form of ritualistic art-making, like the dual radio live broadcast I Am A Strange Loop, we did in Dunedin for the Blue Oyster Gallery Performance Series back in 2010, which endeavored to question individual and collective experience and the site of performance. The approach in FFM was to be quite intuitive and mercurial, to not cling to genre classifications and to respond to situations instinctively. I think all the qualities and histories of each member are well represented in the band and make it the unusual entity that it is - my interest in drone music and electronics, Bek's metal and disco leanings with Cortina, Andy's polyrhythmic dance beats, Steve Heathers' jazz drumming. I think Bek's intuitively performative strengths helped shape the theatricality of FFM, and as a group we approached each gig quite ritualistically, considering the place and situation we were playing in and bringing to it our own theatrical elements. As for Bad Statistics, this is very much a mutant mongrel made up of all the members made more mutant by the one and only Thebis Mutante (how's that for alliteration). I would say that Bad Statistics is possibly the most theatrical!

You make work in both experimental music and fine arts contexts – do you make a distinction between these two realms of activity?

I have generally always made both music and art in parallel with each other, and sometimes they overlap. I take an inter-disciplinary approach to my work, exploring interconnectedness between sound, moving image, and object, but not preferencing one above the other. As far as I am concerned it is all art-making. I am not an essentialist, and am not really that interested in the discussions that often develop around the nature of/situations for/importance of sound art and music in relation to the visual arts and vice versa, as it very quickly devolves into polemic speak that does nothing for the integrity of

other more interesting ideas that lie behind the work.

Would you describe your work as being 'psychedelic'? Are you a 'psychedelic artist'?

Ha! Yeah, I'm a psychedelic artist, whatever that may mean. Time-space conundrums!Deep space!

Was The Garbage and The Flowers your first band? Do they still play? What did you get up to during the 90s?

Ah yes, that was the first band I was in as a baby-faced teenager, as old footage I recently [loaded up on Vimeo](#) can attest to. Oh that is a long story that should probably be saved for some other space and time. Needless to say, our double LP from 1994, Eyes Rind As If Beggars, has been [re-issued on Fire Records](#) and includes a variety of previously unreleased outtakes, and liner notes by Jon Dale which details quite a bit of that history. TGATF are still putting our records. Yuri Frusin and Helen Johnstone both live in Australia and occasionally play live with Stuart Olsen on drums.

Any new upcoming releases coming out, or reissues? Any live shows coming up?

I have recently been doing some music for film, in particular soundtracks for two short films by Auckland artist Gavin Hipkins. I performed live to one of these films, 'The Quarry', last month at The Physics Room in Christchurch; and the other, 'The Dam (O)' was recently shown at the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen in Germany, and will be screening here in Auckland on Saturday 3rd August as part of the Shadow Lands program in the upcoming New Zealand Film Festival. Otherwise no live shows planned at the moment, and I really need to get some recording done!!

Torben Tilly – 'Nobody But You' Exhibition Thursday 4 July, 5.30pm start (opening), runs until Saturday 3 August 2013 at the Audio Foundation

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