

Part 6

Interviewer:

10 years ... that's quite a long time?

Peter:

Mm yeah.

Interviewer:

This wasn't an actual real farm, this is just land with a house right?

Peter:

Yeah it wasn't a farm at all. it was less than an acre ... it was quite a large section with farmland around it which we could walk over and stuff which was good, to go and get wood ... there were trees and that! I sort of got used to it after getting over being depressed for quite a while, I think ... I had the use of a really nice room in the Octagon, in the old Regent building, probably for 10 years.

Interviewer:

As a studio?

Peter:

As a studio, yeah.

Interviewer:

Do you think that your music helped with your depression?

Peter:

I did music regardless. I've always done music regardless of anything, just all my ... ever since I was 17 or 18 I've never not done music. And I didn't know I was depressed or anything but I remember Janine came and stayed with us and she said to Kim that I was depressed and she was right, yeah. Nobody else noticed ... it was just more normal.

Interviewer:

But you started the label at that point?

Peter:

Well about a year later. What happened, was Flies played quite a bit ... it was pretty good but it was still in that thing in transition from songs ... it was mainly improvised ... well they weren't songs but there were some lyrics. Kim did some vocals, I even did a vocal or two and there were kind of very basic riffs or motifs or something ... but mostly improvised and then Danny went away to France. This woman that he ...

Interviewer:

Was it Viv?

Peter:

No Margot was her name. He had a sort of relationship with her and I mean sort of because it was sort of off and on and that, Anyway, she went to France and he went over there and was in Europe for maybe six months or something like that ... Belgium I think. And in the meantime Brian ... we sort of fell out with Brian which was sort of strange. I can't quite remember why but it might have had nothing to do with ... it might have just

been that he wanted to concentrate on the Renderers. At the time but we sensed he had a real ambivalence about the improvised thing ... whether he wanted to do that or wanted to do songs. I remember him talking about what the Renderers were doing and it was to be more accessible at the time but ...

Interviewer:

You were almost going in an opposite direction weren't you?

Peter:

Yeah. Then Danny came back and so the three of us continued playing and we called it Rain. That was ... there was ... we got a real buzz out of it for some reason just the three of us playing all improvised stuff. It just worked better and so you know we got quite a buzz out of it. We did a single with Peter King ... you know a lathe-cut single ... and decided to start our own label, which we'd been thinking of doing for quite a while. At this stage Bruce had moved on to Corpus Hermeticum and in mid '93 I played ... I think it was '93, I might be wrong ... it was either '93 or '94 ... I played for the first time with A Handful of Dust. That was a very interesting experience because Bruce ... I saw Bruce or got a phone call from him or something and he said do you want to play at this time and place. I said 'Ok yeah' and I thought that sounded quite interesting because I knew what they did or what their previous stuff had been like. I said 'When are we going to practice?' and he said 'We don't practice. You just turn up at the gig.' And I thought at least we'd get together and get familiar with each other's playing. No, no, that was against the rules so I turned up at the Empire and then they ... the other rule about A Handful of Dust was this really strong dope! So they take me down the street and we have this really strong dope. We come back and there's quite a few people there ... this is the Empire, playing at the Empire ... we come back in and whoever the other band is are playing and there's way more people than I'd expected ... sort of completely stoned. Anyway ...

Interviewer:

It must have been good though, you must have had a great time?

Peter:

It was interesting yeah. It was kind of scary, it was quite scary because it was completely ... obviously with Flies we'd had little bits of structure but not many but there was none of that with Dust.

Interviewer:

And did it work?

Peter:

Well that's on 'The Philosophick Mercury,' that performance or part of it ... I think it's on that, or maybe that's the whole of it, I don't know. So it was good to do that. But Rain became quite a strong thing, I think, and the label ... I think we were pretty convinced ... I remember Kim had talked to Michael Morley because Michael had the idea a couple of years beforehand about starting a label and about some of the mechanics of it. Then Kim and I when we ... not long after we moved here we became co-editors of the University Literary Review with Caroline McCaw who's a local artist who's done a lot of stuff, sort of published a lot of stuff. Like she was the main person responsible for *Spec*, the Radio One magazine ... I should show you some of those actually. And she was increasingly into that David Carson-type typography with unreadable text and stuff like that and was always getting into trouble with poets and writers for messing up their texts so you couldn't understand it. But we became quite good friends with Caroline and the whole Literary

Review thing was quite good fun because we could only work after *Critic* ... that's the university newspaper ... had finished at night so it was like the sessions that we did on the Literary Review started about eleven or midnight or something. And Caro worked those hours anyway and so from midnight to three or four in the morning or something which is a whole different way of working. But there was also a CD with it and so it was a huge production ... it was amazing ... and somehow we managed to wrangle all this money out of the university. So we put together ... Kim and I put together a CD and it was the first time we'd done that and we just got all the info about it from Bruce or Michael or somebody ... how to get a CD manufactured in Australia and did it in a package

Interviewer:

Was it through Lucas Abela?

Peter:

Probably ... I know later on we always dealt with him. I'm not sure if it was that first time. That CD had people like Alastair Galbraith, the Sandoz Lab Technicians, Nigel Bunn, Douglas Bagnall, Sandra Bell ... a whole lot of people from that whole scene.

Interviewer:

Were you kind of setting up, you weren't setting up as competition to Bruce obviously but were you kind of filling the gaps that he was leaving maybe?

Peter:

I think we thought of it a bit like that because by that time Bruce had moved to Christchurch and he was starting to release more people from overseas. We thought ... first of all though we started just wanting to release our own stuff ... it was more like a self-release thing, but under a label name. And we were really interested in a whole label aesthetic ... I mean I related to it to the mid 70s/late 70s DIY thing with the small labels and Kim from an art point of view with the artwork and graphics and everything having some kind of unified aesthetic. So that was really exciting and our first release was the Rain album 'Sediment' on CD.

Interviewer:

Did that do very well?

Peter:

Well it did actually and it just got all this attention. Flies had previously released an album. Just going back again, although probably not so much in time ... we'd fallen out with the guy from Majora, Nick Schmidt, over ... There was a guy from Chicago who came out and he had a label Kranky ... called Kranky ... and he wanted to release a Dademah CD. We said 'Well we've broken up but we've got this Flies ...' We said okay we'll see if you can do a compilation of all the Dademah stuff, which was just an LP, two singles, and a one minute track from the Xpressway one minute compilation 'I Hear the Devil Calling Me,' which is great one minute tracks by a whole load of people ... and put them all on one CD. Because Nick hates ... the Majora guy hated CD's and wouldn't have anything to do with CDs ... he was a purist, he was a total purist. But he got quite pissed off because originally he was going to release the Flies Inside the Sun album and so Kranky ended up releasing both. We got a really mixed reaction for the Flies Inside the Sun album because people who liked Dadema didn't really like Flies Inside the Sun. Dademah had had quite a lot of ... sort of acclaim almost ... we were mentioned a lot by other bands and stuff like that. It was just that we'd coincided with some kind of revival that had been happening in the States which we didn't know anything about at that time in the early '90s. But Flies didn't fit

into that at all and people couldn't really work it out because it was partly songs ... that first album was partly songs and partly improvised stuff. But the Rain CD, the first Metonymic release, got a lot of really good press and sold out, yeah, and it was successful in that way I suppose. And so the ...

Interviewer:

You covered costs?

Peter:

Yeah and we could pay for other releases and stuff. And the first few Metonymic releases we did ... the second Flies Inside the Sun album which I actually think was much better than the first and was probably one of the better things that we ever did, That did pretty well too and we did a Total release by an English guy called Matthew Bower who played in Skullflower who wrote to us wanting a release on Metonymic. We started to get people wanting to have releases on Metonymic.

Interviewer:

Outside New Zealand as well as ...

Peter:

Yeah, from outside New Zealand. And we did some other things. That's right ... at the same time I still wanted to release some song stuff but it didn't really fit with the Metonymic aesthetic. So I started a label called Medication just to do some song things and did a ... mainly archival things actually ... that was ... we did a live Terminals and we did a Victor Dimisich Band retrospective which had a whole lot of live stuff and the original EP on it plus some practice stuff and things like that. So there was quite a lot of stuff, but unfortunately when that was released our house burnt down and so for the second Rain album and the Victor Dimisich Band album most of the pressing was destroyed in the fire, plus a lot of master tapes and recordings and stuff because the house completely burnt down. It was ...

Interviewer:

How did it burn down?

Peter:

Well it was sort of weird. What they traced it to ... I suppose it's still speculation ... but the fire people traced it to Kim burning incense. We went into town and she left incense burning in her studio because there were really strong paint fumes in there and ash from it must have dropped on some paper and then there was all that flammable paint and stuff and it just took off. And the house being so old just completely ... and sort of out of town ... it just completely burnt to the ground.

Interviewer:

That must have been devastating.

Peter:

Yeah it was. It was just sort of traumatic, just to go back there and there's nothing there. Just completely gone.

Interviewer:

And you'd put ten years of work into it?

Peter:

No, at that stage that was only ... that happened in '97 or '98, I think ... yeah so we had only been there for four years. But there was a lot of stuff destroyed. Kim especially had a lot of photographs and things and all her art stuff and then all my music stuff so that was all gone.

Interviewer:

How did you manage to pick yourself up from that?

Peter:

Oh just by keeping on going. I think we were both like that ... by just keeping on doing what we did. Quite quickly, Kim's brother ... it was quite lucky Kim's brother is a builder and he offered to come down and build us a new house!

Interviewer:

That's phenomenal.

Peter:

I know. And he came down with her nephew as well and two other guys came down.

Interviewer:

For free?

Peter:

We just had to put them up while they were here and feed them and stuff and we paid for all the materials. But we paid no or very little ... I think we paid some ... but very little labour costs which you'd normally have to pay. So it was an incredibly generous thing to do and we helped them and built a new house, quite quickly too. They were quite amazing actually.

Interviewer:

You basically could build a house to whatever you wanted then?

Peter:

Well yeah ... and that was a weird thing that we never thought we'd have.

Interviewer:

You could build a studio for both of you?

Peter:

Which we did yeah ... and all that ... and so we built a house that suited the way we lived. Kim already had a studio and I had ... well I suppose I did too but they were parts of the house you know and we could have them a bit separate from the house, which we did, and got into a routine of ...

Interviewer:

And you were still in Rain at this point weren't you?

Peter:

No. Rain finished just before that because Danny went away, moved away, I think he moved to Hamilton ... that's right because I remember he wanted to be near Raglan so he could surf.

Interviewer:

That's where I met him.

Peter:

Probably '97 ... that was just before the fire. Brian and I ... we'd started playing together again. Whatever happened with Brian soon got forgotten about and we started playing together again and that was alright ... that was fine. We just kept playing music and we'd also started at that time to play with Susan and Nathan. Su Ballard had been in a band called the Sferic Experiment who were ... Xpressway had released a cassette, I think ... definitely one of the bands at that time around in that ... Su being really young then ... I think she was just out of school at that time but there were other people in the group who did stuff later on too. There was Sean O'Reilly, Chris Heazlewood and there was Greg Cairns, so it was an interesting group. I never saw them in their original state. I saw a couple of reunion sort of versions of them, which were good too.

Interviewer:

And wasn't actually Stefan Neville down here at that point and Andrew Moon and all that lot they were all here too weren't they?

Peter:

Richard was but I didn't know him. I don't know Andrew Moon but Richard ... I remember talking to Richard subsequently and we'd been at the same ... he'd seen us play and we'd been at the same gigs and stuff but I didn't actually know who he was. But we knew Stefan because I have this memory of seeing Stefan in the Union Hall, the university hall, at lunchtime. They used to have lunchtime concerts there and this is with a whole lot of people eating and trying to ignore him. He was doing his one-man-band thing in this place and there was Kim and me and there were about half a dozen people who were there to see him and everybody else was trying to ignore him and some of them were yelling out rude things to him but he was just playing on regardless. We really liked what he was doing and he was part of that whole mid-'90s Dunedin thing. There was also a group called 303 Concrete Method.

Interviewer:

Who's that?

Peter:

Well that was Sean O'Reilly and possibly Chris Heazlewood and Brian played with them for a while actually ... all these hot-shot guitarists! And Greg Cairns was drumming. There were ... right through that there were various versions of the Puddle. As far back as Scorched Earth Policy we'd played with the Puddle both in Dunedin and Wellington. Actually we played with them ... a version of the Puddle ... there was a really good version with Lesley Paris drumming, a couple of Look Blue Go Purple, and a horn player who died ... I can't remember his name. They continued with different line-ups right through that whole period and still continue to this day. They were occasionally amazing although you never knew quite what you were going to get with them. Who else? I'm trying to think who else was around then ...

Interviewer:

Was Clayton Noone doing stuff at that point?

Peter:

I think in Invercargill but not in Dunedin. Yeah I think we'd heard of him and heard of Matt, both were putting out tapes from Invercargill.

Interviewer:
And Clinton?

Peter:
Did Clinton come from Invercargill?

Interviewer:
Maybe he's just there now. No he's down in the place beginning with 'B.'

Peter:
Blenheim?

Interviewer:
Yes. Isn't he there?

Peter:
No it's up there ... getting near Nelson ... up the top of the South Island, yeah.

Interviewer:
So Rain had finished?

Peter:
Rain had finished and Flies had re-emerged or whatever and we also were playing with Susan and Nathan ... Kim and I and Susan and Nathan were playing as Sleep. We started to play as Sleep before the fire and then after the fire we just continued playing and played quite a lot of music which was a good way of sort of getting over that. We were playing in Christchurch with Flies Inside the Sun ... I think at first we played here and Brian ... I think Brian somehow reflected what we were feeling, not that we were feeling violent or anything, but he did these really violent performances. I remember him putting stones inside his guitar ... he had a semi acoustic guitar, I think, and having it all miked up and kicking it round the floor and things. And we did this at the Dux in Christchurch which is ... I played there with A Handful of Dust and both those performances were really ... the Dux is a regular kind of meat market venue that people go to ... so both playing that kind of music at the Dux and specially that kind of performance! I think had quite an impact ... it was quite good to do that! And Kim and I played with Bruce in PRS at that stage and we played in Christchurch I think. So we played quite a lot of music in the period after the fire.

Interviewer:
And Kim was painting still at this point as well?

Peter:
Well Kim was painting more and more. Kim ... I first met Kim when she was painting in Christchurch. She started painting a lot, like everyday, and she had ... we went up to the North Island and she got interest from dealers and stuff although it was funny because she had never been to art school and the Brooke Gifford in Christchurch being a sort of snobby gallery wouldn't have anybody who had never been to art school sort of thing. It was quite funny yeah ... but people at some of the North Island galleries weren't worried about that. They were only worried about the work and she had two shows with Greg Flint.

Interviewer:

She was starting to get successful at this time?

Peter:

Yeah she got quite a bit of recognition and she was also part ...

Interviewer:

Sorry, how were you actually living all this time, what were you living on?

Peter:

Mostly on the dole. I mean at first I had some money because I also had superan(nuation) from the wharf but mostly on the dole with the odd job but not regular. And Kim believed in that too, that you should live on it, that you should first be an artist and then live.

Interviewer:

Ideally it's great.

Peter:

It's pretty funny. But yeah, in practical terms it can be quite difficult. We lived on next to nothing, very frugally, and we had a garden and stuff. She was starting to get quite a bit of recognition but then she decided that she didn't want it. It was sort of weird, you know, the whole Auckland dealer gallery ... Wellington and Auckland dealer gallery thing. Then she sort of pulled back from that when we moved here. She was still doing stuff but I think she got less interested in the dealer gallery thing. She probably started making films from about then too ... she had been yeah ... just those sort of Kim films, a very slowed down, usually very contemplative, kind of film. Yeah I'm just trying to think ... she did have some shows and she had a show here called the *Dereliction* show, which was great ... that would have been just before the fire. She just got a space, a warehouse space in town, and had I think her *Dereliction* paintings ... I'm not sure ... they were similar to that. They had very little on them and they ... oh, maybe they got burnt up in the fire ... some were out I think ... I'm not sure, a lot of those things got burnt up. But and she had them around the wall of this space and then she had just drawings, small drawings that people could buy for five dollars, all over the place. I think that was just at the stage when she was not having anything to do with the dealer gallery system and had this thing that people could bypass them. Flies played and Donald McPherson played ... he was this mysterious guy that we'd heard about who the Sandoz people knew but he's so much more talked about than ever seen. He'd released a number of Peter King lathe-cut records in editions of 15 or 20 or something and reputedly destroyed any remaining copies of anything of his at different points. We tried to get him to play in public with us and he did a couple of ... I don't know what you call it ... he got stage fright when he got up there and when it appeared he was going to start playing he'd just get up and walk off ... things like this ... especially one time when Tom Lax was out here he did that. So he didn't want to play live but he was a very good player and later I released a thing on Metonymic.

Interviewer:

Yes it's a very beautiful piece yeah.

Peter:

He was one of the people there ... he played at the *Dereliction* show. So there were things like that ... events you know ... right through this whole period there were sort of Dunedin events, quite good and usually multimedia ... usually with film, music, some other sorts of visual art and things. It was pretty good and just doing stuff after the fire sort of kept us ...

Interviewer:
Sane?

Peter:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Yeah it's a really big deal losing everything like that. Do you need a break now?

Peter:
Yeah.

Part 7

Interviewer:
As we've just been discussing, you clearly chose to be artists rather than parents at this time?

Peter:
Yeah well it definitely came up at some point and I think Kim had originally wanted ... she comes from quite a large family and she had thought that she would have a large family and especially for her then it was a decision, a conscious decision that we couldn't afford ... we couldn't take care of children and still be artists you know because we were poor and doing what we did there was no prospect of us not being poor, put it that way.

Interviewer:
Do you ever regret that at all?

Peter:
Oh very occasionally.

Interviewer:
And of course Dunedin is one of the few places that you can actually do that too isn't it?

Peter:
Yes because people ... I think there are a number of things about that here ... because it's a smaller place and there's more of a community thing that, even despite what I said about the divisions between the noise and the song crowds, you still end up seeing people quite often and there are village-like things. So to exclude people with children or people without children would be silly because it's not ... you get art openings where there'll be children running around and Caro's sons are just terrors! ... Miro the eldest one must be about 12 now but I remember him leading these packs of children through these art openings with people holding drinks and art works around. But it was just normal, usual for Dunedin, and nobody was offended by it at all ... sometimes people from outside were and found it difficult. They weren't used to having children ...

Interviewer:
And of course on the opposite side too it was probably just as acceptable to be an artist and not have children because you can live that cheaply in Dunedin, which in other places in the country it wouldn't be possible.

Peter:

Most ... a lot of the artists ... and that includes us ... live for a lot of the time on the dole with occasional supplements from jobs and things and that was possible with the relatively cheap rents. Like we owned our own house and at that stage houses were quite cheap to buy or had been until ... then they just sky-rocketed. So you can live cheaply here and that's probably a factor too.

Interviewer:

Where were we with the, you were in Sleep?

Peter:

Yeah we were in Sleep ... we'd started playing quite a lot with Sleep and they became our main group. Kim had given up music before the fire actually. I think because she'd ended up doing a whole lot of the graphics ... everything ... it was not actually playing the music but more all the other stuff to do with the label. She did a whole lot of work for the label like designing things and doing graphics and I think that she felt that was taking up too much of her time and taking away time from her painting which was the main thing that she wanted to do. So she stopped playing music probably for about a year before the fire but after ... except for Sleep and that was very occasional before that but after the fire it became more regular and she still played. She still played occasionally with Brian and me too as Flies. We played as a trio or just a duo ... like at Kim's *Dereliction* show Brian and I played as a duo and we probably played a few shows like that. That's quite good fun playing with a really small group ... it's much more exposed but it's good. I quite like that.

Interviewer:

And of course all this time the Terminals were still running?

Peter:

Yeah the Terminals still continued. We had that really ... the period between 1990 when John and Brian joined the band and when both Brian and I moved to Dunedin which was like '93 ... there were those three years where I think musically we made big strides. We had live shows we played where we were sort of incorporating the whole improvisational noise thing into the song thing. It became, you know, quite a well-integrated sound in that period and that was probably our best period creatively, both in terms of sound and in terms of songs. In that period we did two albums on the German label Raffmond, 'Touch' and 'Little Things' and we played live. That performance at the Gluepot was funny because we played with the Puddle ... we played before them at the Gluepot ... I think we swapped over in different places ... except we just ... I think our show was pretty wild and Mick set fire to himself! It was this weird thing when we were doing 'Do the Void' which is a kind of ... I don't know ... one of our most out-there kind of things, which he sings and suddenly in the middle of it ... I'm behind the drums so I'm not really taking much notice of what Mick's doing ... suddenly he runs over in front of me and I see this flash of flame. I couldn't quite work it out. We were playing a thing that's got quite a momentum so it was hard to take much notice but I remember being just quite puzzled and then John poured beer on him or something ... grabbed a glass of beer quickly ... and it just kept on going. It all just kept on going. So there's kind of a flurry and a burst of flame but after we got off everybody was talking about this and what Mick had done was that he'd put a candle down his pants and put lighter fluid on it or something. It was so weird because he usually wore clothing that was so flammable, rayon kind of clothing, and he could have gone completely up in flames. Of course it caused a big stir. Then after that it was very difficult for the Puddle to play and there was a review somewhere and the reviewer raved about this thing and stuff

like that.

Interviewer:

So it was actually deliberate on his part?

Peter:

It was just him going wild. There was a performance in Dunedin where he completely destroyed, literally destroyed, a keyboard. He was holding bits of it up and it was still on so it was making all these sounds. I don't know why he didn't get electrocuted or something. He'd tend to do things like that quite often. So in that whole period through to ... probably through to about 1995 or '96 ... Terminals' performances got quite, probably closer to Dead C territory really. Even though we were still doing songs they got noisier and noisier ... we used to play at the Dux in Christchurch and in that small room with people packed up to the stage it was just so loud, it would be just deafening and with all the doors and windows open. Those kinds of performances ... I remember we'd start off and I'd think 'God this is so full-on' from the start. It was just that whole period where things got like that but I think the songs were getting lost by then. It became a noise and we'd sort of ... as we got noisier we kind of shed the whole Flying Nun song crowd ... the older people wouldn't come and see us anymore and we got this whole new crowd of younger people who were more familiar with noise-rock stuff ... like Guy Treadgold was one of those ...

Interviewer:

Really?

Peter:

There were a whole lot of those people ... often art students and people like that. So we got a whole different crowd which was quite odd and those other people still went and saw the Bats or something like that but wouldn't go and see us because we were in a different category by then.

Interviewer:

And the line-up stayed the same?

Peter:

The line-up was still the same. But yeah ... but then with Brian and me being in Dunedin and us doing more and more improvised stuff, I think there was sort of ... with Stephen and Mick becoming increasingly unhappy with the whole noise direction or the extent to which it had gone I think there began to be differences between us. Although we still played every year we didn't have any ... well we didn't get together often enough to develop any new material so we just were doing our greatest hits or greatest non-hits each time we got together. So things became quite distanced between us. Then I said I didn't want to play live with the Terminals anymore because I felt we were just doing the same thing and I think Mick, especially, took that as a real rejection, because for him ... and I didn't realise it at the time ... the band was quite a family thing you know. I just saw it as a musical group and didn't really think of it in that way but it was an important part of his life and sort of taking ... he felt that was being taken away from him. They ... Stephen and the other Christchurch Terminals started a group called Minus Two which was just guitar, bass, maybe some cello ... because John played the cello sometimes ... and organ. I think Mick gave up playing the synth and went back to play the organ because it's a traditional instrument. They wanted to get back to doing traditional songs and they wanted to get back to doing songs first, you know, and so there was quite a division between us. But the only years we didn't actually play were, I think, '99 and 2000. I think two years that we

didn't play but every other year we played, still played, usually two or three shows in Christchurch and Dunedin. So that time was sort of ... I was pretty much seen as being in the other camp and I probably saw myself in that way too and I think the Terminals were like a ... they became a lower priority compared with the Improvisational stuff.

Interviewer:

You were pretty busy at that point anyway weren't you?

Peter:

Yeah doing Metonymic as well. And that became more and more too because we'd sort of started up again after the fire and still did stuff even although we'd lost a lot of stuff and that really set us back. We never actually sold that kind of numbers again. I think around that period things changed with the distribution ... I can't remember why ... but some distributors stopped and some of them folded owing us money and stuff. It was much more difficult from '98/'99 round there. Maybe some of the thing too that there was a kind of ... New Zealand had been the flavour of the month when we started, around that time, but it was no longer. So it was kind of ... things had changed a bit I think ... we still released stuff but it was much harder to sell and to keep to that thing of releasing stuff from around here. Often it was stuff that nobody had heard of overseas and increasingly they wouldn't listen to anything they had never heard of, a circular thing. They weren't interested ... the distributors weren't interested in taking stuff that didn't contain ... it wasn't viable if it didn't contain somebody that they already knew because people were ... there was so much stuff out there by that stage.

Interviewer:

That's right, it was the beginning of the sort of digital age really wasn't it?

Peter:

Yes. There was just more and more stuff.

Interviewer:

So that's 2000 we're talking here?

Peter:

Sort of the end of the '90s, really. And the whole label thing had changed too ... labels overseas had stopped too.

Interviewer:

Is that a good place to stop?

Peter:

Yeah.

Part 8 – September 28

Interviewer:

We're up to the year 2000 year and Peter what would you say was the difference between your and your personal practice between the song-based work that you've done and your more improvised work?

Peter:

It's sort of interesting because it was a gradual thing for me in that ... that whole transition to being able to play totally improvised music. I think, as I mentioned before, I'd played bits and pieces, particular songs or parts of songs with song groups like the Vacuum and the Terminals but there's a real leap when you go to playing totally improvised stuff. So it's sort of like ... it's a leap of faith because you're sort of jumping off, you know, into the deep end. You've got to make decisions in the moment so you're not making them consciously ... it's all quite unconscious. It's not a call and response sort of procedure but you're playing parallel to other people ... with other people ... and I just found that tremendously exciting, that you could go anywhere at any time. At the same time you're negotiating musically with other people so you've got to be a lot more mentally active.

Interviewer:

And present too.

Peter:

Yeah very much too, Also another ... just a point coming from that ... in different ... playing in different places you can actually adjust your playing much more to the place and you're actually conscious of your environment, as well as the other people you're playing with and your instruments and um different instruments sound different on different days and in different places. You can adapt much better to the environment so it's much more in tune with where and when you're playing. I found with songs, often you tend to impose your structures on places and sometimes it just doesn't work. I remember here at the Public Art Gallery, which is a great venue downstairs in the foyer with a massively high ceiling just sort of verging on the cavernous but on the good side of cavernous to play in. I remember we played there with improv. groups and various touring people and things sound great there because they kind of inhabit the space but I remember when the Renderers played there it just didn't work. It didn't work for a group playing straight songs. They couldn't handle the natural reverb of the room and stuff like that.

Interviewer:

So it got pretty much dissolved?

Peter:

Yeah and it justit really didn't suit ... just as an example. There's a whole lot more thinking but it becomes unconscious ... that goes into playing improv music compared with the song groups. Playing songs ... like I enjoy playing songs and, as a songwriter or co-songwriter, it's quite exciting when you have a new song and it suddenly appears and you play it. That's good, but then after a while there's a not a lot you can do with it, Now I know of groups, for example the Velvet Underground, who played songs differently in different places at different times. They're probably the best example of that. We've tried to do it with the Terminals too and we have done it, but it's never to the same extent. So basically you're talking about the same song each time. It's not radically reworked unless you consciously do that. Then the whole thing of structures ... well I like Brian's songs and Brian's songs tend to be very simple and depend more on feel and intensities. So they're much more abstract if you like than Stephen's structures, I've played with Stephen for so long now that I understand his structures but other people playing him often find them quite difficult because he does changes, often reasonably complicated changes. I mean as a writer of music, he's probably one of the best around, I think. I always think of him and George Henderson as being able to write melodies, but it's a whole different way of thinking and there's a pre-arranged structure that you have to adhere to. So yeah, playing improv or whatever ... I always have difficulty with the terms for this ... we got round to calling it 'experimental' music because that's sort of an overall term but at one stage we'd

always call it 'noise' music, 'free noise,' or improve ... but playing that music is more rewarding from a playing point of view.

Interviewer:

Right. I find it really interesting. I noticed this yesterday that because you're a drummer and I've noticed this with other drummers that there's always this rhythm going on in the background when you're speaking so you're actually, just so that the people know this is recorded, Peter's foot is going in time to what he says the whole time he speaks. It's fantastic.

Peter:

I used to drive people mad by tapping on tables and things!

Interviewer:

Yeah and I've noticed it with Stefan and Rosie, they both tend to drum while they talk because it's sort of like, it's this impetus I think yeah that ...

Peter:

Well I guess it's our way of expressing ourselves percussively.

Interviewer:

Yeah, but it's interesting how you must have rhythm in your head or body the whole time going on and it just comes out when you're slightly more unconscious. So in terms of drumming it's such a structured activity anyway, how does that work in an improvisation context?

Peter:

I found it difficult at times. I was always a pretty ... I never had much technical training or anything ... so I was a pretty basic self-taught drummer and I drum fairly linearly. The drummers I really liked were Maureen Tucker from the Velvet Underground and I liked Jackie Liebezeit ... I'm not quite sure how you say his name ... the Can drummer ... and drummers like that who drummed a kind of pulse. That's often quite linear drumming and to actually drop that constant rhythmic emphasis and to be arrhythmic was quite a step at times. It's not really being arrhythmic but I know I went through a period with A Handful of Dust of consciously trying to be arrhythmic so to just drum sound and intensities. I think at times it worked and at times it didn't, but just using the drums as a colour instrument. Say with A Handful of Dust, Bruce especially, or both Bruce and Alistair, were quite rhythmic anyway so it didn't really need drums to be rhythmic. I think what I've come round to now is a bit more of a synthesis of the two that I've gone back to playing quite rhythmic improv music ... and I'll talk about it ... but it is probably more linear than say Sleep or Flies or somewhere in between.

Interviewer:

When you say linear, as opposed to what?

Peter:

As opposed to rhythms broken up, shifting rhythms,

Interviewer:

So you're talking about continuous rhythms?

Peter:

Yeah, where drums would be used more as colour and to accentuate ... yeah that whole thing of ... I suppose the free jazz thing of playing parts of phrases or whatever on the drums, whereas the rock thing is being in there on the beat. So I think it took me a long time to integrate those things and it sort of made me a little bit uncomfortable that I was playing song music and drumming a particular way and then drumming in a completely different way in playing this other type of music. I kind of wanted to integrate them a bit more and play ... so I probably ended up playing more structure in the improv and less structure in the ... or more improv in the structure ... somewhere in between a bit more.

Interviewer:

Do you find that because you have such an emphatic rhythm that you tend to lead where the improvisation is going or?

Peter:

Yeah, I've probably found that mostly with Eye ... at times Eye has become quite drum-led and partly that was because ... especially when ... I suppose I should talk about Eye a bit more?

Interviewer:

When was Eye formed?

Peter:

2003. Yeah, right at the end of 2003. But we've had different phases. It started off with Nathan and Peter and me ... this is after Kim and I broke up and Sleep had finished. I think Nathan, especially, wanted to do something that was a bit more rocky, Sleep wasn't rocky ... Sleep was a sort of weird experimental chamber music or something. It's really hard to describe but at times it was quite complex and I don't think we were technically adept enough to play the complexities that we were trying to play.

Interviewer:

Interesting, I haven't actually heard much of Sleep so I can't comment.

Peter:

Partly because Susan had ... she was playing the viola and then the synthesiser but she probably had a knowledge of ... just a bit of classical training, I think ... which interested me but I think Nathan had never been in a band where he could rock out. Like Sandoz were always quiet boys ... sort of ... that's what we used to call them 'the quiet boys' and they played little bits of sounds and stuff at that stage. I think they got louder later. But we did some rocking out which kind of amused me because I'd played in bands that rocked out like Scorched Earth that, you know, were really full-on at times and Peter and ...

Interviewer:

This was Peter Porteous?

Peter:

Yeah Peter Porteous ... because this is post-Lines of Flight.

Interviewer:

Which we'll come to later ...

Peter:

He came down and played with Empirical from Auckland with Marcel Bear and they played at possibly the first two Lines of Flights, I think. Then Peter and Alice moved to Dunedin ... I'm not quite sure of the year ... well it must have been then ... it must have been 2003. We got on quite well so thought we'd play some music together. So that version of Eye, the first version of Eye, was Peter, Nathan, and me ... them playing guitars and I was doing stand-up drumming, which is something I did ever since I moved to Dunedin, to almost like set myself a task of doing something different to get out of a rut or just to force myself to do something different. I stood up and I'd have the kick drum mounted on a stand facing up and had like two toms and a snare and I'd be standing up drumming and after ... you know the fashion of Maureen Tucker who did it with the Velvet Underground

Interviewer:

Which is really hard on your back I would have thought?

Peter:

Well a lot of people said that but I found that when I sat down again I got a sore back and I'd never had a sore back in my life. Because you're hunching when you're ... if you stand up straight like you're supposed to it's like virtually anything ... if you're sitting at a computer or something ... you need to sit up straight while you're drumming and relax. It's the same rules as for anything that you use your back. But it was physically exhausting because I tended to move around the drum and I did that from ... I first did that with A Handful of Dust ... when I played with them ... and then with all the improv groups. I even did it with the Terminals for a period, which disconcerted the others a little bit because they no longer had a kick drum. That kind of threw everything a bit adrift, which I kind of liked, because it sort of put it into a different area and that it was good from a more physically expressive point of view, being able to move around. Also from the ... probably from Rain and early Flies I started playing samples ... usually environmental samples and stuff, recording and playing them and then later I processed them, so I could do that as well and just do a bit more and move around a bit more and play the short-wave radio which I used to do and different radios.

Interviewer:

When did Ryan come into the Eye?

Peter:

Okay so we're going back and forth quite a lot.

Interviewer:

Sorry, I just suddenly thought short-wave radio because he was using samples too wasn't he?

Peter:

No what Ryan was doing ... well we had Eye with Peter and Nathan on guitars and me on drums. But Nathan ... soon after that, I think in early 2004 he and Su went to Sydney and there was ... so we had to decide about getting somebody else in. And Ryan Cockburn was this young guy ... I think he'd been a masters student of Su's actually and his practice was ... he was a turntable player although he didn't want to be called a 'turntablist' ... he refused to be called a turntablist because of the connotations. You know it was kind of a fashionable thing to do! What he actually did was cut records in half and then put them back together, different records back together, which I think is possibly a Christian Marclay thing. He loved Christian Marclay and was quite open about his, you know, admiration for him ... but a lot of his practice was derived from Christian Marclay and other people doing

that kind of thing. He had a radiogram, a beautiful old radiogram, which I think was pink in part ... it was painted pink! So he was a very atypical turntable player, if you think of the sort of hip turntable player with the flash turntables and all that. He had this kind of antique turntable and he cut up records. So Peter and I started playing with Ryan and Ryan also performed solo as Spit ... because he lived on the Spit at Aramoana, which is right out on the end of the sand which is shifting, falling into the sea ... there's a house on the end of it. So we played and that was really interesting ... quite an exciting period for us because it just put us into a whole different area because it was a very skeletal sound with Ryan doing his turntable stuff and there'd be unexpected things and also humorous things like I remember playing at the Physics Room and Peter and I would be rocking away and then suddenly there's all this opera singing comes in at some point and it's Ryan. He had a whole lot of sound effects records that he got from ... maybe old radio records ... yeah various sound effects, radio sound effects ... things like that. And so it sort of ... there was a little bit of reflexiveness that came into it too, so sort of almost looking at the medium. So that was quite interesting. I think in that period the drums became the lead instrument because Peter doesn't really lead the band ... he's sort of happier ... but I think Peter's guitar is the sound of ... he's got this lovely guitar sound. We actually played a lot in that period because of Ryan being young ... we had three generations in the band too ... there was me who was 50 whatever at the time or about 50 and Peter who was probably in his late 30s and Ryan who was in his 20s ... which was quite strange. But that's also a thing about improv music. There's a lot more mixing of generations ... at least here in Dunedin ... I'm not quite sure if that happens everywhere but I think maybe it does. Whereas you know in say rock groups ... I'm not actually talking about old family groups or anything like that or even that ...

Interviewer:

That was one of the things that I really enjoyed about this community when I first became aware of it and that unlike the music industry when if you get over a certain age you're gone, you've lost your career, it's almost here that people understand like jazz and classical music the older you get the better you're going to be and there's a lot more respect for the elders

Peter:

Yeah. It's just about playing music. The other thing of course is the marketing of pop and rock music ... the young person is the target audience. But yeah, so that's a bit about Eye. We played a lot in that year. We played a few shows at the Public Art Gallery supporting people. We played before Alan Licht, Tetuzi Akiyama and Oren Ambarchi and played with a few other people who came and toured. That was really enjoyable. Having Ryan's energy, his youthful energy, was great too. We played in Christchurch ...

Interviewer:

So that spanned what, from 2003 to?

Peter:

It was probably through 2004 and 2005, I think, probably a couple of years. Then Ryan went to Melbourne and we continued our exchange programme with Australia when Nathan came back and rejoined. At the same time, before they went away ... I think we played before Su and Nathan went away ... Su, Nathan and I played in a group called PSN. No prizes for guessing what the initials are but again it's having to find a name. PSN Electronic was the idea that we would play only electronic instruments, like old electronic, or new electronic instruments. So then we were doing, I guess, sort of soundtrack stuff with samples. There was a bit of synthesiser ... Su was playing a bit of synthesiser and I was doing radio and samples.

Interviewer:

Right so you weren't playing drums at all?

Peter:

No, no traditional instruments at all.

Interviewer:

At this is what you played at ISEA?

Peter:

Yeah. So when they came back ... it's been a very occasional group ... but yeah that's the group we played with in 2008 in Singapore at ISEA ... Nathan and me in person and Su by Skype from Port Chalmers! She was too pregnant to travel at the time and she played ... for her it was something like four o'clock in the morning ... from the living room. Shall I talk about that?

Interviewer:

If you want to, yes.

Peter:

It was an interesting experience going over there and playing. We were playing after the opening of the New Zealand exhibition at a place called the Substation which was like an alternative gallery venue.

Interviewer:

In Singapore?

Peter:

In Singapore. Probably quite alternative in Singapore terms, from what we could work out.

Interviewer:

What was the larger context of this, was it the ADA?

Peter:

Yeah, the New Zealand show was organised by ADA ... I can't remember all the people.

Interviewer:

There was Zita Joyce and ...

Peter:

Oh yeah, the organisers were Zita Joyce, Stella Brennan, and Su ... they were the three organisers ... but I can't remember all the people in the show.

Interviewer:

Oh right, there was quite a few wasn't there?

Peter:

Yeah. There was Et Al, Len Lye ... which is kind of strange being in an exhibition with Len Lye! There was Stella Brennan.

Interviewer:

Wasn't Bruce in it as well?

Peter:

Yes. The three sound works in the show were by Bruce Russell, PSN and Adam Willetts. So we helped set those up ... just the listening works ... and we were to perform, Adam and us were to perform late at night after the opening in another part of the building. Actually, the venue that they had there was a sort of dedicated venue. It was an interesting day because on the day of the opening the street outside ... it was sort of a side street ... was completely blocked off for a performance by a guy who had got second in *American Idol* and his band. It was ... so it was a big quite high-powered thing ... they had these big canvas barriers and everything. You could walk down the side and get into the gallery, but pretty much the whole street was taken up with this large structure, sort of scaffolding and a huge PA. They might have had some seating but not much. I think people were herded into this space in the middle and there were maybe four or five Singapore support bands before, so they were going from about midday. Talking ... we got quite friendly with the gallery people and at different times they'd tried to get the street blocked off, just to have a street party, because it wasn't an important street or anything as far as traffic went. It was just a side street and they'd always been refused point-blank but because this guy was sponsored by Sony ... I think it was ... and Singapore Telecom he'd no trouble at all and with all the security people wandering around being officious and stuff the gallery protested against them. That was a big deal in Singapore because evidently the previous director of the Substation had been put in jail for being part of a protest against the treatment of maids in Singapore and there are a few sort of fascistic aspects about Singapore, the government in Singapore, and the whole thing against any sort of protest or demonstrations is one of them. So it was actually quite a big deal ... it meant something that they were doing this protest against this sort of imposition. They put up a big banner that said 'We were here first' which was great and they had a musical ... a sort of series of acts playing in the ... sort of in the doorway of the gallery space which was facing directly at the canvas wall which was about six foot high around this blocked off street. They had ... it was a bit like Dunedin actually, it reminded me ... They had kind of ... what would you say ... sort of indie rock and pop groups, but some of them had women in them which I think for Singapore it was a bit more of a big deal and street theatre and poets and stuff like that.

Interviewer:

This is what the gallery had?

Peter:

Yeah the gallery had organised this more alternative music.

Interviewer:

Right and were they totally drowned out though?

Peter:

Well, this is what I was going to say ... I think you could hear them, I don't know how much you could hear this stuff inside the thing but the most effective protest in terms of sound was two of the guys and one of them was the sound mixer, who we got quite friendly with and who later mixed us, played some synthesiser very loud, right outside the gallery and was actually interjecting into the performance. Now I'm sure some of that could be heard. This went on for quite a while and then security men starting walking around talking in their walkie-talkies and the police turned up. At least they weren't arrested, they were just told to stop. The Singapore support bands were alright, but the main act was hideous. We looked

him up on the net and it was a guy called Christ Daughtry and his band. He hadn't even won *American Idol* ... at the time we were told he'd won *American Idol* but he was the second place getter or something. Anyway after all that and in-between it all there was the opening in the gallery which went really well, with quite a lot of people there. Then Adam and we played afterwards starting about 10.30 at night and by that time they'd finished outside which was good. Adam played first and it was really fantastic ... I'd never seen him play so amazingly ... he was very theatrical and the place was packed. That was quite weird because we were thinking well how many people are going to turn up to this, it's so obscure.

Interviewer:

ISEA is full of obscurity isn't it?

Peter:

Yeah. Of course a lot of them were delegates from other ... but there were actually quite a few Singaporean people there too, because we'd spent quite a lot of time with the gallery people, the Singapore musicians and the guy who was mixing us ... talking with them because we hung around there most of the day. So there were some Singaporean musicians, which was good, and Adam played and then we played afterwards. The whole thing with Su was quite funny because when we were trying to have a bit of a sound-check we just couldn't ... she didn't come through. She'd come in bits ... little bits would come through and then there was ... it was quite frustrating. So we'd almost given up on it and thought we'll just play anyway but for the performance she actually came through fine, although she said later that she could hardly hear us and at 4 am from her living room in Port Chalmers... But that was part of our whole media thing too ... we were interested in working with different media. It went really well and people seemed to like it. It was interesting because their PA and the facilities were so good and the mixer was so good, compared with what we had here. We thought we were playing quite loud but then when we heard a recording of it ... we made a recording of it ... it actually sounds very peaceful and restful and people who were there said that. So it was kind of odd that we had a different idea of what we were doing. I don't know whether that was because we were quite ... probably quite keyed up by the whole day ... although the sounds we were using were kind of radioish sounds, pretty much all drifting radio sounds and stuff like that.

Interviewer:

You were flown over to Singapore?

Peter:

Well that was a really weird thing too. You play here and you get \$20 or something and then suddenly just out of the blue you get flown to Singapore and get put up for a week ... to hang around for a week! We were supposed to also do a talk which never eventuated, not because of us but just because of the organisation but ...

Interviewer:

And paid to do this as well?

Peter:

Yeah!

Interviewer:

You got a fee for it?

Peter:

Yeah we did. It was bizarre.

Interviewer:

Yeah really cool though.

Peter:

Going to Singapore on a junket ... which was quite good in the middle of winter in Dunedin!

Interviewer:

Do you mind if I just stop there?