

## MATT MIDDLETON FOR THE AUDIO FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewer: Shall we start at the beginning, tell us about where you were born and the family?

Matt: Yeah sure. I was born at the site where McDonalds now stands in Invercargill. I can't recall the name of the hospital but it was the early morning of 22 December 1974 and it was quite a long winded birth. Apparently I came out with a fairly screwed up face - so much so that my mother's sister started crying because I looked so ugly - but of course I straightened out a bit and yeah....so born then, fairly normal childhood, working class to lower middle class kind of upbringing. My boozing and womanising father left the scene fairly early. My mother looked after me until she met her next partner who would become my stepfather, yeah fairly uneventful childhood. Fairly typical actually. I wasn't interested in music per se until a troop of out of school music teachers came to our assembly at school in Invercargill. I was going to South School which is dirty old South Invercargill and

Interviewer: Is that primary school or high school?

Matt: Primary school. When I go back down to Southland, Invercargill now it's really a fascinating place, it's quite desolate. It's quite depressing actually but I spent most of my childhood there. I was essentially quite happy. Yeah these troubadours from out of school music classes performed a few songs for us and talked about, it was almost like a church group or something, trying to recruit the faithful.

Interviewer: Was it religious?

Matt: No it wasn't, it was kind of like a bunch of recruiters from a Christian group or something but it was secular, out of school music classes. Yeah went home that day and was interested and ended up going to out of school music classes, age nine. I started off with recorder as everyone does and first term I was absolutely terrible at it. I hadn't switched on in my mind and I got really kicked in the teeth by a terrible report from this teacher, really depressed. I was in tears and something happened, something clicked over the holidays in between terms and I just suddenly could play the instrument well. My ear just kicked in and my ability to play tunes.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Matt: Nine. The recorder just started happening, just overnight and I came back and the teacher was amazed and said that I had progressed in leaps and bounds and couldn't believe it and stuff like that. That was recorder anyway. Then I took up clarinet aged 10 and you know went from that level playing clarinet officially right up to the age of 13 and joined the Southland Youth Orchestra for a short while. Yeah got up to Grade 5 Honours on clarinet, took up saxophone as well so you know real standard kind of stuff and it wasn't until I was introduced to drumming at Cargill High School by a friend of mine, this weird Christian dude, a Salvation Army dude - he played drums, he was into metal and stuff, bizarrely enough, taught me a few rhythms on the drums and I took to it like a duck to water and that was kind of when the spirit of rock n roll and all it stands for sort of seeped into my being, I joined a metal covers band at aged 15. Started drinking at age 15, not regularly. My first fun and not so fun experiences with alcohol. The name of that band at first was Viking and we played Metallica covers and Judas Priest covers - I suggested we change the name to Asphyxia which they appreciated, these sort of slightly out of town Bogeny metal dudes - my interest in music was evolving at that point. I was around 14/15

here. I was starting to be introduced to heavier music and one thing led to another. Someone would come to school and introduced me to Death, the band Death, and I heard the first chords of that album Leprosy and my stomach just sank , it was just so blood thirsty to me at that time. Then it was the next level up – which was Obituary. This was 1989 and 1990 when Thrash and Death Metal and Tampa, Florida Death Metal was all the rage. I had no idea about alternative music or experimental music at that point. It was just where I was you know. There were underground elements listening to stuff like that. More sort of punk sort of tradition, people like Keiran and his crowd but being a young teen living at home I didn't really know that crowd so it was Metal for me. Asphyxia, I quit Asphyxia much to their chagrin.

Interviewer: Who else was in that band?

Matt: I can't remember now. I can't remember their names sorry.

Interviewer: Were you playing gigs?

Matt: Oh yeah, chagrin is used to explain strong feelings of annoyance or displeasure. What's that?

Interviewer: Were you playing gigs?

Matt: We played a Road Knights party once, it was a fairly interesting experience. It was a silly hat party, the Road Knights at the Country and Western hall - that was the hall that the Aesthetics played at. It was actually quite...it wasn't as debauched as I thought it would be, of course maybe later on it would have got a bit crazier, but yeah we played a souped up version of Born to be Wild and I wore some stupid hat. I always had this weird fascination with the Road Knight's leader but anyway these Asphyxia guys were friends of their friends or something and of course I lived on Balmoral Drive as well so I could go to their parties and stuff ...but I got out of that scene very quickly anyway. Especially at the point where one of their friends was about to go and fight a bunch of homies around the corner and of course one of them was in the soccer team with my step-father. I was told not to tell my stepfather about how they were grabbing chains and about to go and beat up homies around the corner. Anyway I got out of that scene pretty quickly. I don't know if this is relevant but I wanted to play heavier music. There were these other dudes who played heavier stuff, more like Thrash, Death Metal and the name of that band was Putrid. This guy Jay Selwood and Carl Leaden and I joined that band on drums and it was at that point where my technical ability as a drummer was really starting to take off and I was in Putrid for a while. We played at Cargill High School one lunch time and they started throwing shit at us, it was quite funny. Putrid changed their name to Arcane and those were my first experiences with recording, we recorded a demo blah-de-blah.

Interviewer: Were you like a technical Death Metal drummer. Could you do all...

Matt: As much as I could at the time, yeah. I wasn't super technical or anything but I could pound out what was needed at the time and I was fairly fast with double kick. Around this time at school I was starting to listen to bands like God Flesh and the stuff from Earache Records that we were starting to get into the world of alternative music and industrial music which seemed to lead on to more and more obscure stuff and my interest in Arcane waned. It was just evolving patterns really as everyone has early on. I formed a new band after I left Arcane. I think the height for Arcane was playing support for Dead Moon in Invercargill a couple of times and playing support for the Psycho Daisies and we played

support for Push Push at the New Field Tavern one night.

Interviewer: So Arcane was quite popular?

Matt: Yeah we were starting to get a little bit of a thing going on. We'd played at the Southland Music Club and one year I won Southland Drummer of the Year.

Interviewer: Did you get a prize?

Matt: No not a real prize, just a stupid thing, a plaque to put on the wall and the honour of being Southland Drummer of the Year.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Matt: 1992 I think or 1991. Either '91 or '92. But anyway I'm just being chronological here basically which is kind of boring I suppose.

Interviewer: Were you still playing clarinet and saxophone while you were doing this?

Matt: Yeah I was playing clarinet in a classical, well yeah I was a little clarinet classical guy from 10 to about 15 . The highest level I got to was Grade 5 Honours but then I became more interested in drumming. Then I started my own band, it was more along the hardcore lines and I was getting interested in self recording around that point and I started a band call 'Pus' and it was a three-piece, this is when I was starting to become interested in non music bands, it didn't matter if the players weren't virtuosos. I was losing interest in virtuosity and Metal, correctness in playing and we released a tape in 1990 I think, it was called Fuck Iraq. Little did I know that my ideas were so brainwashed by the American imperialist agenda but yeah that was just a bunch of real lo-fi stuff we recorded in the kitchen. I also after this point started a band called Disciples of King Spasm. God I'm all over the place here. After '91 I went to Southland polytech and I did the music performance course there and met Dan Tait and this guy Paul Hubbard and they joined Arcane and after the demise of Arcane I started up this band called Disciples of King Spasm with Dan Tait on vocals. That was getting more and more into the, well actually it was just grunge really to be honest - because that was all the rage down in Invercargill at the time. But there were glimmers of a kind of independent lo fi twisted edge there in some of this music and that had it's day. We played at a Battle of the Bands up in Dunedin and we were beaten by the Feelers, this is way back when the Feelers sort of sounded like Pearl Jam. They started out sounding like a grunge band and they beat us and we were all upset because we made it to the final. Listening back the music was very much the music of a teenage mind. I mean it just hadn't experienced real life. It was trying to be complex, too complex when the ideas behind it were too simple. It just lacked emotional depth, that's what I'd say now of course. It was visceral, as a drummer I would try and throw as much technique into it as I could, I didn't know much about expressionism at that point - until I started being expressionist myself. There was a little thing I had with Dan Tait in the King Spasm band room called Bog and we released a tape, that was probably the first or second Dirt Love tape release. At this point I really started getting into tape recording . I was listening to bands like Sonic Youth and noisier stuff and I had seen the 3D's and Snapper play live and I was really starting to be influenced by this stuff, I'm obviously of the younger generation here - but Bog happened ---and then I decided one day to do solo recordings on a four track. My friend Gavin Gordon had a four track and one afternoon I went round there and laid down this frenetic bunch of songs and that would be what would be called The World is so you Have Something to Stand on which was the first ever Crude

tape and I had a little label to go with it called Dirt Love. This was 1993/94 in Invercargill.

Interviewer: Were you aware of other cassette labels and things like that?

Matt: Not really.

Interviewer: You were just basically doing it yourself?

Matt: It was very much what I had available to me and what I could afford and yeah what materials were available and cassette was the way to do it. I suppose it was the whole demo aesthetic. I didn't treat it as a demo. I treated it as an actual release.

Interviewer: Because that's a real Death Metal thing as well isn't it? The demo and it's a release basically.

Matt: Yeah someone was talking to me about that the other day, a demo. The industry will call anything that wasn't recorded on x budget a demo, like if it didn't have a high budget it would be a demo, they wouldn't accept something as being a release in itself. But yeah, so that was the first tape and I sat on that for quite a while and at that point I shifted away and I went to Christchurch and had dreams of hooking up with the right people.

Interviewer: Was that why you moved to Christchurch?

Matt: Yeah I shifted to Christchurch to just move on and get away from Invercargill and start-up somewhere else. In Invercargill opportunities just weren't reaching out to me. So I shifted to Christchurch. I lived with my aunt for a while and sent my Crude tape out to a few addresses I found. By that point I had seen a couple of King Loser shows, I was especially blown away by the King Loser show at the Newfield Tavern when they played with the Three D's and Snapper in 1992. I sent my tape to the address on the back of a King Loser cassette which happened to be Dwayne Zarakov's address - and I actually got a reply back . I also sent my tape to Forced Exposure for some reason, I don't know why. I had seen FE in a magazine somewhere and thought ...oh yeah. I got a reply from Dwayne Zarakov saying 'that's really interesting shit and you should come and have a jam one day' - and I also got a reply from Forced Exposure saying 'wow I really like this stuff.' I had sent FE some stuff that I'd done in Christchurch. So to clarify, first I sent a tape to the back of a King Loser thing and Pat Faigan, and ending up jamming with him. He had a four track and I did some four track work on his machine and I sent that material to Forced Exposure and I get a letter back from Byron Coley saying yeah this is really great stuff and we want to release a record. I couldn't believe it actually. It was amazing. I was just this young 19 year old fresh out of Invercargill, two years previous playing, trying to play bloody thrash metal and now I was getting into the Indy scene, straight into it.

Interviewer: International too.

Matt: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was that the stuff that became Repute A Myth?

Matt: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did that happen that early?

Matt: Yeah it was stuff around that period. It was all music around the first year I was in Christchurch which was '94 and also when I was back in Invers I recorded a little bit more there, yeah stuff I'd done around that period and it must have had something to it that Byron Coley appreciated, the fact that I was from New Zealand ? ....I don't know or whether it was the fact that it was done so simplistically so it's so brutish? I don't know but it would have had something that he liked. In so far as the connection with Pat, I ended up playing clarinet with his band, Space Dust. I was recruited into Space Dust and ended up meeting a lot of Christchurch's underground people through them. I met Violet Faigan and Saskia Leek and was scared to death by people like Bill Vosburg.. You know - young guy just out of a sheltered life in Invercargill meets the schizoid blues guru from Christchurch. Yeah I hadn't had much experience with drugs either at that point. Better watch what I say here I suppose. Don't want other people to be incriminated. Yeah if we just pause.

## Part 2

Interviewer: So we're in Christchurch.

Matt: Yeah just fresh out of home with stars in my eyes and mystical experiences happening all around me or so it seemed. I played frequently with Space Dust and it was just, I met people who were more involved in the kind of an art scene and met, finally met, the members of King Loser and had my head twisted by their very being - so very young, very impressionable but learning the ways of the cash starved Bohemian underground bands and artists.

Interviewer: How were you, what was your income?

Matt: Over my lifetime I have been a beneficiary. I have been a very successful beneficiary, a long term beneficiary - but from time to time I can earn a little extra and am working to stymie that status. Stymie : to thwart, stump a problem in thermodynamics. I think that was what I did actually. Yeah financially I think early on I may have thought that if I pulled the right strings, if the right things happen I might be able to make a living off the music but it never really eventuated and caused me some distress for some time. Anyway it was around this period where I met members of King Loser and I got my Refute a Myth Society LP's pressed which was part of a series of LP's that Thurston Moore and Byron Coley had been working on, a series of releases by various acts that were a tribute to Sun Ra and the cover art was kind of taken from the Act Royale Jazz Series styles so it was a gatefold sleeve, large gate fold sleeve and each artist would just provide an insert and there was about 20 I think, or I might be wrong, but yeah I was asked to contribute to that and of course I wasn't fully aware of Sun Ra at the time but the album does have psychedelic elements to it, some of it was quite psychedelic. Now having met Patrick Fagan in Space Dust he gave me dozens of mixed tapes which is what he does and basically my awareness of what music was out there was just totally expanded and, you know ,he introduced me to a lot of psychedelic music, a lot of true outsider and indy and low fi stuff. Some of the classic rock and rock stuff, the Stooges, what have you. There was a lot that I hadn't heard of. A lot of the true rebels. A lot of art music as well like Suicide which had become one of my favourite acts of all time so I've got him to thank for a lot of my musical education, but not all of it. There are other people who have broadened my mind and infused me with more influences. Keiran Monaghan for one played me Swans and Big Black early on which was a real experience. Lots of people and other bands that I've seen, other friends' music. You know friends music. I really do feel like I belong to a scene here of DIY artists, who cross pollinate their ideas, a lot of swapping of tapes and recordings. So after a year in Christchurch to the chagrin of Pat and the Space Dust crew I shifted to

Dunedin with this guy James Robinson who was part of the Christchurch's little industrial scene at that point. He had a band called No TV, well No TV was the name of his solo project and he was in this famous Christchurch band called TMA1 and he sold me his Juno 60 synthesiser which became one of my 'signature' sort of instruments that I've used to this day in the Crude line up, in the Crude recording palette and we travelled to Dunedin, shifted to Dunedin and I set up shop there and started recording more cassettes. I was basically recording constantly.

Interviewer: I was going to say were you prolific with Crude in the Christchurch period?

Matt: Yeah I basically, after starting the Crude project in 1994 I would just record constantly.

Interviewer: Did you get a four track?

Matt: Yeah I bought a four track, well I was given a four track, thanks mum, in Christchurch. Oh no actually that was from someone dying in the family, that's right. I spent that money on a four track, a Fostech X28H cassette four track and carried on what I'd started in Invercargill in '94 and I would do it constantly. I wasn't out looking for jobs. I was just recording constantly. Shifting to Dunedin didn't make any difference. I would just record constantly and the tapes kept flowing. It was all tape back then. A little bit back down the line in Dunedin I was contacted by Shane Carter because Chris Heazelwood had recommended me as a drummer to him - he was looking to either get a new version of Dimmer together or get some musicians in to practice with - which is probably more what it was at that point. Of course I've got stars in my eyes at that point and anyway I jammed with him for a while, but through that (and I'd given some cassettes to Chris and Shane ) a lot of that material ended up becoming part of the Flying Nun album which was released in '96 - and I think Heazelwood had a bit of hand recommending to Flying Nun to do something with me because at that point I think Flying Nun was lot more in a position to 'take a risk' perhaps than it might have been 10 years after that point. I mean even King Loser was a risk for them. At first it was going to be just a 7" - but they thought outside the box and considering I had so much material they wanted to make a compilation , and that ended up being the Inner City Guitar Perspectives album, of 1996, and that was released on LP and CD and yeah that was a real turning point because I thought that's it I'm now going to be looked after for the rest of my life - perhaps because I was under 20.

Interviewer: Above ground.

Matt: Yeah and nothing much really changed for me. My behaviour around this point was becoming a little bit, I was a little shit actually, burning bridges and not following up, not turning, well you know just being deliberately difficult I think. But that was then, this is now. So yeah of course I just keep recording anyway and I began developing the DirtLove label around that point and I started the Aesthetics that year '(95)or just before the Flying Nun album came out and that was with James Robinson and Russell Coveny and me, we didn't really have much of a name for ourselves initially. Who does when they start up. Should I continue chronologically?

Interviewer: It's up to you.

Matt: Yeah because I hope it doesn't really sound like an ad or a bio or something.

Interviewer: You don't have to talk about everything. Don't feel you have to talk about

everything.

Matt: Okay yeah. I must admit I feel blessed because I was given a few really good opportunities like Thurston Moore releasing the first Aesthetics LP. Even supporting Sonic Youth was a pretty big deal for me, getting to give Mr Moore all this material and stuff.

Interviewer: He's been quite a patron of yours hasn't he?

Matt: He certainly has been. Over the last few years I haven't had the amount of discourse with him as I had in the mid to late 90s but it feels good to know that he has a little collection of mine sitting in his grand archive and it's good to know that I can talk to him and get a response. But I think he is the sort of grand-daddy of....he does play the role of a person who knowingly nurtures new bands which doesn't make me a special case. It does feel good. For some reason around these years after getting the Juno 60 I started getting into electronic music, wanting to make electronic music I think I sort of left the guitar fold, the Flying Nun sort of guitar vocalist mode behind a little and started just releasing tape after tape after tape of 'electronica' I suppose you could call it and that became more and more complex and I'd been taking acid and taking bloody this, that and the other thing and not leading a particularly settled life and I think I moved on with the technology quite quickly. I was an early adopter of putting things out on MP3 and putting music online at mp3.com etc. This is around 2000. Along the line there was another US released Aesthetics cd. And so on. I received a Creative NZ grant in '06 and actually went to New York to play - so a lot has happened over the decade.. Basically I feel lucky - at the same time I have also led this very down to earth lifestyle where I have never really had much in the way of capital. Of course this is a typical story for anyone who wants to go down the road of the sound or the recording artist. Especially if your objective isn't necessarily commercial success. I need time to realise what I'm trying to either express or get out or aesthetically realise. I need to be at the service of these creative urges 24 /7 at the end of the day. The benefit in various forms has certainly helped me in that respect. Of course I'm not getting any younger.

Interviewer: How does it feel to go and play in America?

Matt: The US, oh that was a real turning...well it wasn't a turning point. It was a real, oh that's another cliché isn't it, luckily I had four gigs set up for me, semi professionally by an ex kiwi living over there who a lot of people were quite miffed at when I was over there... I heard lots of stories, but luckily she handled most of the gigs and I had somewhere to go - because for the life of me if I hadn't I'm not sure that I would have been able to get it together myself! But playing there was just, I always look for similarities when I go overseas. For some reason I see similarities to New Zealand. I'll go to a venue and I'll relate it back, it will feel just like another night at Chicks Hotel or something. It was amazing.

Interviewer: Did you find places in New York that reminded you of home?

Matt: Yeah basically the Cake Shop, not so much Tonic, that was more like a concrete floor, large stage, a huge bunker, huge room but the Cake Shop was more like your classic sort of café bar up the top and venue down the bottom in the basement and I did feel quite at home I must admit. I wasn't thrown by the size of the place I just kept my own sort of space and didn't, made sure I was alert and moving and just minding my own business, I came there to do a job. I went there and did the job and went home and did the best I could. I made a few contacts but not as many as I'd hoped. You know come on, the few

Americans who came to the gigs really did enjoy it and I made a few sales and they enjoyed the music, they were friendly, they were helpful. In a way I saw many similarities to the New Zealand scene. People had the same problems. Of course you had obviously way more opportunities in the States to perform being so many more centres to perform at.

Interviewer: Do you want to stop?

Part 3

Interviewer: Okay I wanted to go back to, we sort of skimmed across it yesterday. You were in Dunedin and you were finding some success with the (unclear 0:00:23) and release.

Matt: Getting something released is a success.

Interviewer: You're starting up other projects, Dirt Love records is

Matt: Yeah a little tape label...

Interviewer: Is functioning.

Matt: ....which was an outcrop of stuff that I'd started in Invercargill. The first Crude tape I released, no Bog tape I released was the first Dirt Love tape. Yeah so it's something I've been doing for a while. I did a tape for that band Pus, stuff like that, so it goes way back to the first gulf war.

Interviewer: And you were getting sort of international orders for Dirt Love?

Matt: Only after the Byron Coley Refute a Myth Society LP ,which was about 95/96 people were getting interested in Dirt Love....people like Nick Hodgson. I had a few international orders.

Interviewer: Did the Flying Nun album change things?

Matt: Well I think in my mind I thought there would be a little bit more in the way of... I suppose I had a romantic idea of the sort of 'perks' and 'lifestyle' that might have been afforded to me at that point , but no really I just kept going as I was, got the album released, got sent a few copies, did a few interviews on the radio, had a few shows set up for me, one of them I deliberately missed. I don't know what was going through my mind but there was one point where I had to fly to Auckland to support HDU and I deliberately didn't get on the plane and I think people at Flying Nun didn't appreciate me so much after that which is fair enough really. It's a small country, you don't burn bridges in the music industry in New Zealand.

Interviewer: Was it pressure you were feeling or were you (unclear 0:03:07)

Matt: It was a mixture of the two. At this point it was maybe more pressure when I look back, maybe I couldn't handle it. Oh no of course I could handle it. No it's expectation. In a way I was trying to be a subversive little shit and I did a good job at it. And the weird thing was it was this guy Gavin Shaw who came back to me the most upset about it. He came back and said 'oh they had phoned the cops, they were looking for you. They put out a missing persons alert for me and they were all pissed off about it ' - I don't know why he

came back to me with that information. Hey that's another story New Zealand.

Interviewer: Was he playing in the live version of Crude?

Matt: Yeah I hand picked a selection of musicians that I knew to perform at the Flying Nun anniversary celebrations where Crude got an auspicious gig.

Interviewer: The first Crude that I ever heard was that gig.

Matt: Good friends these guys. I got Iso, was Iso in it? Sorry Iso 12 is a local Dunedin synthesiser electro guy?

Interviewer: I don't think he was.

Matt: Oh no he was in the second line up. I supported Unsane, that's right. Matthew Eddy, Gavin Shaw and the old drummer from the Renderers.

Interviewer: Greg?

Matt: Greg Cairnes, yeah we were the line up. The Crude band for the anniversary night, Chris Knox was in the audience and stuff. We played with the Dead C, so it was a very auspicious evening. I met Roger and he said some weird shit to me, kept repeating himself or something.

Interviewer: Was that before or after the record?

Matt: after. Metaphysically and psychically at those points the ignominious behaviour of King Loser, just pause for a sec while I look that word up. I so hope I'm right. Oh I've got a piece of software for this called 'the sage' its a great piece of offline dictionary software that you can just use. What's the bet that ignominious is the correct word.... 'deserving and bringing disgrace', yes! I'm getting them right. These are not words that I usually use. It's not super difficult language.

Interviewer: I'm not sure of the definition of it.

Matt: The ignominious behaviour of King Loser at the time had a kind of hold over the Flying Nun administration and I was somehow lumped in with that crowd simply because I think Chris Heazlewood had alerted Flying Nun's attention to me via Shane Carter's Dimmer line up and , so I think they thought I was a bit of a freak or something but anyway that's beside the point.

Interviewer: It's an interesting period. Your record on Flying Nun did feel like a surprise that they put it out because at that stage they were doing Garage Land and they were getting slicker and more wimpy and safe and they put your record out which I think is one of the last great records they did.

Matt: Numerous people have said this.

Interviewer: Yeah it's interesting. I know King Loser, they were people who had the nerve to go up there and tell them what to do I think.

Matt: Yeah sure.

Interviewer: I think the same thing happened with the Into the Void record, I believe so.

Matt: That's a classic.

Interviewer: (unclear 0:08:12) let them do it.

Matt: Is that right, good on you Celia. But anyway this was the mid 90s for Christ's sake. I mean Pulp Fiction, No wait a minute that was '97 wasn't it or 8, no it was '96.

Interviewer: I've got no idea.

Matt: The Flying Nun anniversary. Sorry I need to go back online for these historical references.

Interviewer: I think it would be about '96.

Matt: Just after the LP came out. Anyway I think some behaviours of mine led to me being less of a, more of a liability to Flying Nun and this is also at the time when Flying Nun was starting to become more and more a corporate entity and after a while they were completely snuffed out by the local

Interviewer: Whatever it is bought them out.

Matt: Anyway there's a rumour going round, whoever is listening to this, this is probably 2020 so you'll probably be able to correct me on this, but there's a rumour going round now that Roger is trying to buy back Flying Nun.

Interviewer: Yes I heard that. I heard that rumour recently and then I told it to someone who said oh that rumour has been going around for years.

Matt: Oh okay that makes sense. I'll tell you someone else who you should be doing this, Peter Gutteridge.

Interviewer: For sure.

Matt: In fact why the hell am I doing this. You should be talking to Peter Gutteridge, he's got way more mana. He's way more of a kaumatua.

Interviewer: Yeah they did Peter Stapleton.

Matt: He's got a great radio voice.

Interviewer: You're dead right.

Matt: He has got a great radio voice doesn't he?

Interviewer: Stapleton?

Matt: Yeah Stapleton, have you heard it?

Interviewer: No.

Matt: Have you heard Gilbert Mays Lines of Flight documentary, radio documentary in deconstruction, using the methods of deconstruction and post modernist layering. Anyway back on track.

Interviewer: Let's get back to you. So you're still compulsively recording through all this I imagine.

Matt: My recording music was a day to day lifestyle of mine at that point. It was just how I related to the world. I am an artist. It was like I was painting everyday. It was just how I related to the world and I'd do title after title in a chronological fashion and quite speedily, quite prolific. I was getting a name for being the prolific guy or something at that point.

Interviewer: And what kind of developments did that bring to the music?

Matt: Well it gave it a real sort of sense of energy - a lot of it, some of it, just of the liveliness and urgency because it was being done in such a day to day fashion and it also had quite a down to earth flavour to it especially using the four track and that adds to that down to earthness, so it was kind of like a notebook. They were notebook kind of songs and a lot of those early songs ended up as aesthetics numbers.

Interviewer: Would you do a whole album in a day or in a week or a song a day?

Matt: I never got as quick as doing an album in a day although when I started abstracting sound, getting more into experimental and noise music I could do an album in a day no problem.

Interviewer: And you were doing your 'brainwash sequence'...

Matt: Yeah round that period, 98/99, I was doing things like Intelsat 703 and 707. Little red flag goes up, echelon and just noise tracks, just ambient harsh noise that would take the whole cassette. Of course cassettes are fashionable again in 2009. I was releasing cassettes before I released CDR's and some people prefer cassette. But yeah, so at this point 95/96/97/98/99/2000, my living situations would change. I had a girlfriend Jasmine in '97 that blew my mind and she ran off to Med School up in Wellington and I was a bit romantic back then. I still am a romantic. Then I met Folina, this is 2003/4 and so my lifestyle, I was living with wonderful women and doing my thing along with living with them and doing my best to not be a dick and I had a very long period of being single and sort of not desperate but lonely and I very happily met Christine around 2004 when I was living with a guy called Clayton Noone and I've been with Christine ever since God bless her.

Interviewer: So that's five years.

Matt: Yeah, at the moment yeah.

Interviewer: Has that kind of stability changed things.

Matt: I'll tell you what, since my sort of days of throwing the Blue Oyster sign outside their gallery into the window of the Southern Cross Hotel and getting arrested and resisting arrest and screaming and squirming, getting thrown into the back of police cars and subsequent criminal convictions and not caring what happened to me, I've outgrown all that now.

Interviewer: What was going on with things like that? Was it drunkenness?

Matt: I think there was a little bit of an nihilistic streak imbued into my outlook on life at that point which may have a little to do with excesses and certain drugs. For instance around the turn of the century I was using a lot of psychedelics, way more than I should have for myself and it might not have been a hell of a lot compared to some seasoned acid head but it was enough to make me a little crazy for a while. I might have hit it but I think I did go a little bit off the rails for a while, alcohol and trying different anti-depressants.. I was only doing that for experimental reasons. It wasn't habit or anything but that, yeah I was messing around with some stupid psychotropic substances. Anyway I hastily got my shit together after that, well I didn't actually but I made a point of sort of going beyond that and getting my two feet on the earth. I have calmed down, put my feet on the soil and concentrated on getting my shit together.

Interviewer: You spent some time in Auckland, can you talk about that?

Matt: Round 2002, after my stint where I threw the Blue Oyster sign into the window and got arrested and my processing and subsequent depression I shifted to Auckland to try and sort of add some depth to my career and try and relate it to the Auckland scene at that time. I met some good people linked to the riot grrl scene, the sort of DIY scene up there at that point, I lived in a flat near K Road, just round the corner from K Road.

Interviewer: Yeah round the back of K Road.

Matt: I think it's now a gallery.

Interviewer: Cross Street.

Matt: Cross Street yeah. I tried to get the old Aesthetics line up going with yourself and this other dude Sean - possibly not the right time to hit Auckland. I got a lot of recording done but that was just the default position for me. I would record music all the time. I was getting more and more into electronic stuff at that point. I had a friend experimenting, well not experimenting, I had my first bisexual sort of thing going on at that point. I had a friend, a boyfriend up there I suppose you could say. I don't know I was just trying to fit in, trying to get the Aesthetics going, trying to get Crude off the ground and got caught up in a bit of a maelstrom, bit of a stupid scene and I think I wasn't ready for what's required of you up there which is having a good amount of money, the dole just doesn't cut it up in Auckland. Everyone knows that but I wrote some great songs.

Interviewer: What songs did you write ?

Matt: Hombre was one with the lyrics : 'I'm jaded, very, very alone but when I find my honey I'm going to make some money, can't take it, someone should have told me that the city was a zombie and I couldn't find a hombre. That's about Auckland. A few other songs. I wrote a whole passage of Aesthetics numbers in this one half hour session in my little room on Cross Street. I frequented the King's Arms a lot. There was a lot of drinking going on, a lot of alcoholics in Auckland, a lot of the scene was drinking. I don't know if they do that now but still the whole drinking culture, that whole sort of

Interviewer: That's the whole country.

Matt: Oh course, it's the whole fucking world quite frankly apart from Islamic countries. I think we only played one or two Aesthetics gigs but they were immortalised.

Interviewer: I think we did a few, I think there'd be more than you think.

Matt: I was in Wellington as well around that period.

Interviewer: That's right, was that before Auckland?

Matt: Yeah just before Auckland, I tried to do the Crude thing there, it wasn't really the right time.

Interviewer: Didn't you go and spend time with your father?

Matt: Yes that's right.

Interviewer: He left when you were young.

Matt: Yes, that's right he did leave when I was young and a lot of fairly screwed up people have had the split up. Apparently psychologists have said that the split up of parents is actually more traumatic and effects people a lot more than they had previously thought. Whether that's the case with me or not I don't know.

Interviewer: How old were you when he left?

Matt: About four/five. Anyway my father is basically, God bless him, he's David Downing is his name, I changed my name to my stepfather's second name, but it's quite a good name - Middleton. Yeah I stayed with my father in Wellington, got to know the guy. He lived in Taita between Upper Hutt and Lower Hutt which is one of the meanest, poorest parts of New Zealand. It's bit of, I don't know, it was very different from what I was used to in Dunedin, the Scots Freemason outpost that it is. I was in Mongrel Mob territory apparently. But I just sort of kept low, and yeah I did some recording round that point. Tried to shift into town, shifted in with some young punks who ransacked the house and so that didn't last very long and my friend Gordon shifted to Auckland and suggested I go there so I sort of followed him up to Auckland. Then went back to Dunedin in 2003 and I haven't left since. Lived with Folina for a while, split up with Folina. Was doing some great recording, great recording, starting to fuse the electronic stuff with more rock stuff, great songs like That's How It's Going to Be, stuff like that, around that period. The 'New Fundamentals' album and oh 'the Mine' album came out at that point and the song 'the Mine' - just synth rock hits.....in Dunedin at the time there was a bit of a scene for bands like the Futurians.....that whole city rise scene was just starting to happen and that was a really good time to be in Dunedin. I had my first sort of conceptual art installation/performance series when I came back to Dunedin. That was the first time I started to change my focus away from just the traditional pub and playing rock music to trying to make the thing into a more complex kind of art installation type thing because there is a complexity to my work that I don't think the pub rock forum really allows to come to the surface so I played every lunchtime for seven days or something. It was called Kiosk and I even had an opening and it was well attended, there's a few documents, a few recordings from that time. I was fairly, you could tell I was in a fairly sort of nihilist point in my life by the way I dressed and looked but of course I could be way worse. Since then it's just been a real settling down, a real honing in and a real emphasis on the digital.

Interviewer: Yeah I was going to ask you about, you sort of, I mean Dirt Love finished up years ago but you

Matt: Really finished up around 2000/2001.

Interviewer: Yeah you crossed over into loading MP3 albums.

Matt: Yeah in the year 2000 I uploaded my first batch of songs to MP3.com.au with the help of a few anarchists I knew.

Interviewer: Were you giving them away free or were you selling them?

Matt: These friends of mine?

Interviewer: No the MP3 stuff?

Matt: Yeah they were free at that point, yeah. Yeah I uploaded stuff all over the place and intellectual property just, I didn't think about that, I was just an early adopter I think of that and got a website together '05 and really yeah I just basically I make my music on the computer with the help of a few analogue things but yeah, it's all about networks now. Social networks.

Interviewer: Do you find you reach a bigger audience?

Matt: See to be honest with you, I'm not sure. I can't tell. I think I have. I've certainly aimed at getting my music into as many territories as possible.

Interviewer: You're a weird one because in my travels I meet Americans obsessed with New Zealand music and you come up they might know the Flying Nun album and they'll go has he done anything else?

Matt: It's networks.

Interviewer: So they're not part of the networks that you're part of?

Matt: No I haven't done enough research.

Interviewer: It's a weird one because these are people who I would have thought would have been more than aware of your work.

Matt: People like the guy from Last Visible God or something?

Interviewer: Exactly. He's exactly who I'm thinking of. He said that to me. He said I love that Flying Nun album, has he done anything else because I had a Crude T shirt on.

Matt: Thanks man.

Interviewer: You should pitch that guy an album.

Matt: I have and he hasn't gotten back to me dude.

Interviewer: Okay, snowed under.

Matt: He's releasing a lot of stuff.

Interviewer: And you don't even release albums anymore. You're doing these...

Matt: Yeah I decided to sort of streamline to try and consolidate the potency of what I do by recording as much as I did, but not releasing a CD every month or two months, a title that would just go nowhere. Basically I just release a bunch of data at the end of the year and it contains the year's work and that started last year and I heard it's a good thing, it works well.

Interviewer: So you've done two of those now?

Matt: I won't release 2009 one until December this year and I released the 2008 one, see I've actually started getting a lot of orders from Archives at the moment and something about that whole aesthetic appeals to me. Something about my work being put away, something about it being non

Interviewer: It's not a commercial thing.

Matt: Indeed. That is something that really intrigues me. I feel like I'm sort of cultivating, well moving my work towards that ...if someone asks me to have a look at a list of things they can get, more like dealing with an individual buyer.

Interviewer: The commercial music industry it's a horrible thing, it really is. I think it's just sensible to try and do things different ways.

Matt: Yeah exactly. I mean look at the way it's going, free music seems to be the default at the moment. Like with Otto, my girlfriend's son the other day, oh do you reckon you could download me some My Dying Bride and I get him the latest album in 10 minutes off a music blog and that's the way kids buy their music these days, well no that's the way kids get their music these days. So by ..I suppose.... maybe I have this idea that by archiving and making my music more like a thing you go to, to look up in the library or you have to sort of not read, but have to sort of log out or something. It's just a different way of looking at it.

Interviewer: Yeah different way to engage in it too really, downloading off a blog is so disposable. I find you give that a quick listen and if it's not instantly gratifying you delete it. I'm exaggerating but

Matt: Yeah I've got a lot of music online at the moment, on the internet archives for instance but if anyone wants to actually select a title from it they can and they just email me. Basically in the future, as far as the future is concerned and I don't know if I believe in global warming as a manmade thing, I'm not sure, I'm not quite sold on it actually. I'm not a right winger though, don't get the wrong idea but as far as the future is concerned I just want to sort of refine what I've been doing over the last two, three, four years and hopefully tour a bit more. Do a bit of touring, taking some merch along with me and make it that artists are held in the same light as the sports people are.

Interviewer: What about you were saying you've just gone on the PACE scheme. Some plans there.

Matt: Yeah it's been overdue but yeah I finally looked at the concept of Pathways to Arts and Cultural Employment scheme and basically over the next year I'm going to be working towards setting up what I do as a business using that model, using the business model, the tax model, the official model, the legal, legit. model and I'm so happy I've finally gotten on to that. Honestly if anyone out there is an artist who feels alone and has to draw a benefit but there is some real potential in what they're doing consider PACE. I don't know if it's available, Dunedin is a good place for it simply because we have this I don't know, we have this, people I don't know, have got this reputation as being a kind of haven for creatives, sort of reclusive creative types I suppose.

Interviewer: Because the rent's a bit cheaper.

Matt: The rent's cheaper, although I don't know how much longer it's going to be cheaper, in fact it will probably go up very soon. Bloody stadium.

Interviewer: And the Aesthetics are still active?

Matt: Yeah. I started this rock band in '95 in a little practice room with a couple of dudes and we played, well it's always been kind of just a bluesy, noisy, noise rock kind of stuff. Sometimes it's got a faster punk edge, sometimes it's even a little bit new wave. Sometimes it's totally psychedelic, sometimes it can be psychedelic I suppose but yeah we've had lots of acetate 7"s, a couple of releases in the States to my amazement initially - then self-released the Ugly Ambition LP this year and in a way that has kind of like proven to myself that yes you can do it yourself. You can release vinyl yourself. It was my dear grandmother who passed away who I got a little bit of cash and I used that in a creative fashion. Yeah the Aesthetics I love that man, it's kind of, I think it is the number one project for me simply because it involves other people and it's maybe a little bit more accessible. The Aesthetics is more accessible than Crude ultimately. But the Crude is more like a personal sort of alchemic kind of project, it's like, it's becoming quite I don't know like a gradual concentrative kind of meditative alchemic procedure or something with little rituals every now and again when I play a gig. Art installations that go along with it and the Aesthetics was more just meat and potatoes kind of rock band although we are getting a little bit more sophisticated but yeah I'm going to keep rocking with them.

Interviewer: And you play the Big Day Out, the Aesthetics didn't you?

Matt: Yes that was a real coup and that basically sort of said to me it's not what you know, it's who you know in this industry. I think it was really, okay our songs were good, the recordings were good. Surely they would have had something to do with it but I think it was simply because certain networks like it that allowed that to happen but yeah that was a real experience and I don't think those same networks are in favour of the Aesthetics at the moment.

Interviewer: Yeah it's a strange business.

Matt: It's a strange sick little business. Yeah the industry and the radio networks and the people and managers, I don't know just the marketers, the managers, the industry, the children of the industry.

Interviewer: Yes it's interesting having occasions like that playing the Big Day out and you get to engage in that world which

Matt: I didn't engage nearly as much as I had hoped to. I forgot about the, what's the name of the bar there?

Interviewer: Where in Auckland?

Matt: No there was a bar at the Big Day Out that the musicians could go to.

Interviewer: Oh in the Stacey Jones Memorial Lounge at the top of the grandstand?

Matt: Yeah it was called the Immortals bar, yeah that is where you go to schmooze I suppose and I suppose part of what I should have done was go to that bar and schmooze on the day of the Big Day Out. I wore a Crude T shirt and everything but no I forgot all about it.

Interviewer: Is that something that you'd like to do, to

Matt: No I would have enjoyed watching other people schmooze to be honest with you. It would have been fun to watch. In a way I feel kind of like it was meant to be that I didn't go there. But anyway, we self released the latest LP and plan to go to Australia next year and release a cassette because cassettes are so fashionable at the moment. I always try and do what's fashionable basically. I like dark ambient. Some of my stuff is dark ambient.

Interviewer: What's the latest Crude stuff like?

Matt: The latest song is actually, I'm interested in electro acoustic, serious electro acoustic music. I'm also interested in dark ambient film music. Everyone seems to want to make music for film of course and everyone can have music for film, that's the thing it doesn't necessarily need to be ambient music for it to be used in a film but frankly I do do some ambient stuff which would suit a science fiction film. A lot of people have told me that. I've even submitted my music to the Natural History people, I think they've gone under or something but they never got back to me. Some of my stuff is I imagined it would suit micro biological documentaries or documentaries about you know just weird processes and alien creatures and undersea creatures.

Interviewer: That's the world of publishing isn't it and that's weird.

Matt: Oh the publishing world and the licensing world.

Interviewer: Licensing yeah.

Matt: Don't understand any of that.

Interviewer: Yeah me neither. That's in there to make money.

Matt: So the money is actually made in that arena.

Interviewer: It's one of the arenas. That's how I understand it.

Matt: So it's a publishing licensing tool managing, no not so much. Loan sharking.

Interviewer: Protection rackets.

Matt: The latest Crude song is me on the piano and it's looped and it's me singing a little ditty. I sing these little sort of incantational songs with just a small little sonic or bit of poetry in it and I've made a video for it, yeah I've been doing a lot of videos lately. Shitty little videos.' Grandmother'.

Interviewer: I saw the 'New Zealand' one.

Matt: Oh ! did you watch that....!

Interviewer: I liked that song.

Matt: You liked the song, the video is a bit dumb. It's okay.

Interviewer: It made me laugh.

Matt: Yeah it was kind of....I was trying to collect and display negative images of New Zealand instead of the continual positive stuff you see about New Zealand. You're going to have to know my work to want to listen to this. The latest stuff is very much kind of, it's almost acoustic, it's almost very much grass roots stuff. I've been doing some woodwind stuff. Just real simple. I've just been using whatever mic s are around, the laptop mic. I haven't really cared about the quality of the sound, it's just the feeling. Going back to the lo fi thing lately yeah as well as computer chop up stuff but yeah I've been going back to grass roots. I think it's just living in Ravensbourne with this view for so long I think and getting older. I just feel I'm doing more folky kind of stuff as I get older. Never thought it would happen. Ten years ago wouldn't have thought it but I've always had that aspect to my work as well. I mean inner city guitar perspective, there is a folky aspect to some of the songs.

Interviewer: Some of your clarinet exercises, that sort of stuff.

Matt: Not pastoral but some people have said there's a bit of an eastern European flavour to some of my work. Don't know where that came from. It's probably alcohol. Can we have a break.

Interviewer: Yeah I just wanted to ask, sitting here today 13 November 2009, when did you last record?

Matt: Well I made the video for the song yesterday but the last day I recorded was about four days ago so I'd better get busy.

Part 4

Matt: I always find it interesting that the difference between 1995 and 2009 doesn't seem as profound as the difference between 1965 and 1979 or even 1975 and 1989. Why do you think that is? Everything has been flattened off hasn't it? The change is just more subtle you know. Culture seems to be fixed in place for the next hundred years. Things aren't so, it's not so iconoclastic now, it's not so changeable.

Interviewer: Do you think everything has been done?

Matt: Not at all. Because there's always new people to do it, new people, new minds, fresh minds, new situations, new political structures, new faces, new poverty. I think to live on

the same piece of land as Ralph Hotere makes me a lucky, lucky, excuse me can you say that again? Did I just say that. I've just lost it.

END