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Mission Statement: The purpose of An International Journal of Exploratory Meta-Living is to provide a resource for the dissemination of creative works relevant to the subject of meta-living. The journal welcomes both academic and artistic exercises expressed in any medium capable of being transmitted through the physical mechanisms of the journal. Due consideration also will be given to submissions that do not conform to these mechanisms. The journal explicitly forbids the establishment of a regular publication schedule.

Meta-Living: One useful avenue leading toward an understanding of the term meta-living is through analogy, particularly by considering meta-fiction. Wikipedia, the oracle of all contemporary knowledge, defines meta-fiction as “the literary term describing fictional writing that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in posing questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, usually using irony and self-reflection.”¹ By straight-forward analogy, meta-living is the existential term describing a manner of living that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in posing questions about the relationship between existence and reality, using irony and self-reflection among other devices. These other devices include, but are not limited to, scientific inquiry, ontology, various theologisms, sophistry, rhetoric, tomfoolery, transcendental perspectivism and, of course, the omnipresent specter of post-existential relativism.

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metafiction>, accessed 2014 April 16.

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A Note on the Font: This font is Dax Compact Regular, designed by the late Hans Reichel, musician, instrument maker and font designer.

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The Efficient Thought-Opener of Joy: An Interview with Alexandra Grimal

questions formulated by David J. Keffer, October, 2020, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA
answers composed by Alexandra Grimal, October & November, 2020, Paris, France

Abstract: As part of the course, “The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation”, offered at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, students are introduced to the music of non-idiomatic improvisers. Exposure to quotes from interviews with the musicians helps to frame the music in the musicians’ own words, which builds a better understanding in the listener of the context in which the music was created and the message that the music is (or is not) intended to convey. In this vein, the instructor of the course posed ten questions to the French saxophonist, vocalist and composer, Alexandra Grimal.

Alexandra Grimal is a saxophonist, composer, improviser and singer-song writer. She has recorded and performed with many international artists, among them Gary Peacock, Lee Konitz and Paul Motian. She now composes for symphonic orchestras and contemporary music ensembles, as well as singing and playing concerts. After traveling in many countries, she has currently settled in Paris.

This interview with Alexandra Grimal was conducted as part of the course, “The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation”, offered at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in which students are introduced to the music of non-idiomatic improvisers, past and present.¹ The interview was conducted via email. The ten questions are posed by the course instructor (DK). The answers are provided by Alexandra Grimal (AG). In an attempt to acknowledge other sources that have been vital to the development of the course, where appropriate, the instructor provides acknowledgement to those texts that inspired questions, which appear in this interview.

DK: Who has been and/or are formative influences in your musical vision? Why?

AG: I love so many musicians and artists that it is hard to give you an exhaustive list. John Coltrane has surely been a light in my life. His complete work and “love supreme” vision were very strong influences for me. György Kurtág, Giuseppe Penone, Paul Klee, Jean-Sébastien Bach, Ustad Bismillah Khan, Zakir Hussein, Djamchid Chemirani, Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, Evan Parker, my elder brother David Grimal, the painters Fabienne Verdier and Utagawa Hiroshige, my friends, singers Birgitte Lyregaard and Lynn Cassiers, guitarists Nelson Veras and Marc Ducret, pianists Jozef Dumoulin and Giovanni di Domenico, Bo Van der Werf, Manolo Cabras, Fabrizio Cassol and Aka Moon, João Lobo...people in my bands are very inspiring too.

I would like to make a list only of people who are alive, to change from other interviews!

I love poetry, abstraction, and beauty. I love to be questioned by a work of Art. Questioned in a light, deep, and sometimes humorous way. To me, joy is much more efficient in terms of opening thoughts



Alexandra Grimal – photo credit: Denis Rouvre

than dramas. I like to put the audience into a reflective and serene state. So that everyone's inner vision of life can reveal itself and blossom into the world for other human beings around.

DK: Many musicians define improvisation in unique ways. For example, Joëlle Léandre writes, "Improvisation is music of jubilation where the

primary driving factor is incarnate liberty."² What is improvisation to you?

AG: To me, improvisation is being alive, and sharing vital energy with the other musicians and with the audience. It is sharing the miracle of breathing, and apprehending the life and thoughts through sounds. It is freedom to do, to play, to interact, to be able to create the life we want to live, and choose the people with whom we can grow and become wiser.

DK: You have collaborated in the past with Tyshawn Sorey. (Andromeda, Ayler Records, 2012) He wrote, "I've always thought of improvisation as spontaneous composition, really."³ As a musician active in both composition and improvisation, please share your thoughts on how you strike a balance between the two.

AG: Ornette Coleman used to say this phrase. Yes, it is true also to me. Tyshawn is indeed very good at both ways of creating music. Composition and improvisation are one thing to me. They are complementary and feed one another. Composition allows time to expand ideas and structures, improvisation is perfect in its imperfection, when it reaches the organic flow of things. Improvisation is necessary, because it opens new vistas, and composition gives them new anchors from where they can develop. I love both exciting actions in their unique and different ways. Many composers were great improvisers too, like Olivier Messiaen, Bach...They somehow transformed their improvisations into compositions.

DK: You released an album with Joëlle Léandre (Désordre, Montagne Noire, 2019). She has said, "Women in the field of creative music are often forgotten. They don't get called much. They become known thanks to their work, their anger, their personality." Please share your thoughts on the unique role of women in creative music. Do you have advice for young women pursuing creative but unconventional avenues? (Question inspired by Joëlle Léandre.²)

AG: I love Joëlle, and I have so much admiration for her work. It is always an infinite pleasure to play with her. But I hope that anger is not the only way to get known. I think that she is right when she says that, as women, we don't get called much as leaders, even if things are gradually changing. I also think that music is beyond sex or gender. But she is right, it is hard. It is not easy for men either! When a woman disagrees, then she is said to have a bad

character. She sometimes does not get respected for her artistic vision as simply as a man does.

The whole society is trying to come over those ancient reflexes. So, I advise young women to trust themselves, to dare disagree, and if they become "hysterical" or "hard to work with" just because they allow themselves to be in line with their musical visions, then, to keep to their choices and cope with the delicate situations. They must believe in themselves, despite all the obstacles they might encounter, which is extremely hard, I know. And then, to go to work with musicians who respect them and make them feel good and confident. To stand away from the others and be who they truly are. The world has to be built with those who really want to change it.

DK: Do you try to impart a message through your music? If so, what is it? (Questions inspired by Lloyd Peterson.⁴)

AG: I try to be true and humble to what I really want to say and be. Each time, it is different. Most of the time, I hope that I can share ideas of peace, love, freedom and nature. The planet needs us to be brave and invent new ways of taking care of it and also of one another. So I try to make my music beautiful that is to say real and true, to feed others' hearts and share freedom. Freedom to create one's life, freedom to love and freedom to invent our world in a poetic way. An artist has to go through inner revolutions to dare to create and take risks, diving into the unknown. It is also an incredible way to be aware of the fact that we do not know everything, and the more we live, the less we know. Maybe the most beautiful thing is to be present to others and to the world, making each moment as beautiful as possible thinking of the impermanence of things.

DK: Do you have a philosophy or some way of looking at life that you would be willing to share? (Questions inspired by Lloyd Peterson.⁴)

AG: My grandmother used to tell me to build things as if I would live thousand years and be ready to die tomorrow. I love this way of looking at life. Make everything possible so that it would be full of joy and in resonance with one's values, enjoying every moment as if it was the last one. It makes things somehow very precious and miraculous. Nothing is given or taken for granted. Everything is ephemeral, but the things one builds now will make many generations happy long after one has gone...

DK: What do you imagine the future of creative music to look like? (Questions inspired by Lloyd Peterson.⁴)

AG: I don't know what is going to happen in the coming years. The pandemic is surely deeply changing many things. I hope that we will still be able to play live concerts. I do not want to do streaming shows, that makes me feel very uncomfortable. I love to see real people moved by my music, enthusiastic and alive. To me, nothing can replace that. This new international situation reveals more than ever the magic of Art, of concerts and records. It emphasizes the fact that we need art in our everyday lives, to grow intellectually and feed our souls. It redefines priorities in a world where there is so much overwhelming information. I hope that creative music will become even more necessary and that people will discover music they would never have listened to before, just because maybe there is a little more free time with the repetitive lockdowns. Music can transform boredom into happiness! That is very utopian I know, but dreams make dreamers happy!

DK: How has your experience during the current global pandemic affected your musical vision?

AG: Well, it seems that Paris will lock down again for a long period to avoid the virus to expand. So, it is hard to measure how I will eventually be affected. All I know is that until now, it made me focus on what is important to my heart and values. I have always asked myself which music I wanted to play, how and with whom. But, more than ever, it is time for me to make my dreams come true. Fortunately, I have achieved many of them... Now, what do I want to bring to the world? The older I grow, the more I want to humbly convey my emotions. To share very simple things makes me happy. We are so lucky to be alive and be able to be and live with the one we love. I recently was in an International Competition for female conductors. One of them said that in the coming years, she just wanted to become a better person. This is beautiful. I also want to be a good person to me, to the others and to the world.

DK: What question doesn't appear in this list, that you wished had been asked? Please answer it.

AG: "How is it to be multiple in France?"

Well, in France, it is very hard to be an instrumentalist, a singer, a composer, a choreographer... This country always starts from the postulate that one person cannot do many things. If it happens, then, you cannot do everything well. That is really a pity, and it is a very narrow-minded point of view. I used to live in New York City a few years ago, and I had two MacDowell fellowships to compose in the United States of America. I was always amazed by the American spirit. The curiosity for other people is refreshing. When you first meet someone, it is always very interesting. French people at first do not talk to the others until they know that they can do something "clever". It is unbelievable, the lack of interest in others, and the judgment that is hanging on your head before you even have had time to introduce yourself. Furthermore, musicians of different aesthetics do not really talk to one another. There is not much respect for differences. This is typically French. In

Belgium, it is not the same, for example. And it is a real shame. I hope that musicians will be “allowed” in the future generations to play whatever music they want without being judged for it, and express themselves in as many talents as they have. We, French people, have a lot to learn from Americans on that subject.

DK: Do you have any recent, current, or upcoming projects that you would like to talk about?

AG: My first symphonic orchestra piece *humus* was premiered at the Paris’s Philharmonie last September. It will be played again in March 2021.

I also made a piece as a choreographer called *shanta*, for five female dancers. It is almost finished now, and I really hope that I can work a little more with the dancers to have it performed on tours.

Last September, I recorded a new solo soprano saxophone in the castle of Chambord, where I am composer in residency this year. It will come out next year.

A new double record, *la vapeur au-dessus du riz*, a clandestine opera, will be released in November. The libretto in French is written by the author Antoine Cegarra. We worked a lot together to compose and write specially for the seven interpreters of the opera; Bruno Chevillon, Lynn Cassiers, Sylvaine Hélyary, Sylvain Lemêtre, Atsushi Sakai, Théo Ceccaldi and me. That was a great adventure, I am very glad that it will be released soon. I am so sorry that the text has not been translated into English yet. Maybe one day? I really hope so.

I am also composing a new repertoire of experimental songs for *the monkey in the abstract garden* that will be recorded next February. And I am composing again for the musicians of the Paris Mozart Orchestra - Claire Gibault, a ten musicians ensemble piece with a story extract from Jean Giono’s book “the man who planted trees”. Very exciting projects are one my table, I am very

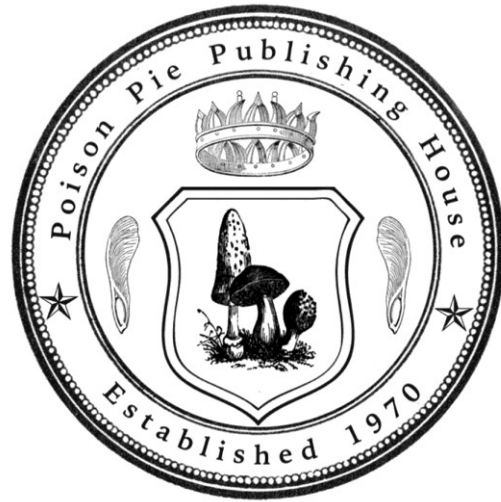
thankful and happy to have some commissions in these tricky times. I hope that these coming lockdown months will give my music an inner strength and beauty that I will be thrilled to share with the audience when it is possible to do live concerts again. Let’s see, I will do my best anyway!

Other Sources

For additional information visit the Alexandra Grimal website at <https://www.alexandragrimal.com/>.

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About The Poison Pie Publishing House

The Poison Pie Publishing House⁵ is an independent publisher specializing in post-existential fantasy generated through a non-idiomatic improvisational writing process. In addition to serving as a publishing house, PPPH hosts an arts blog⁵ and “An International Journal of Exploratory Meta-Living”.⁶