

Addlim

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Interviewed by the addlim.org collective

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

Jason Kahn: I studied drum set, and Arabic/Iranian percussion privately with different teachers in the USA, England, France and Germany.

Probably all this study and practicing played a role in sensitizing me to the actual sounds of these instruments, which has become the focus of much of my work today.

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

Jason Kahn: I use analogue synthesizer, percussion (drums, cymbals, found metal objects) and computer. Which instrument or combination of instruments I use really depends on who I am playing with, what kind of sound I am going for. This also applies to which software I decide to use. In the past I have worked with LISA, my own patches in MAX/MSP and Klaus Filip's Iloop.

addlim.org: What is it that attracts you towards musical experimentation?

Jason Kahn: What most interests me is the process of finding a way of creating the sounds I hear in my head. It is almost disappointing sometimes when I finally have that sound, finally finish a composition as then this process is, at least temporarily, over.

addlim.org: Why are you involved in improvisation, and how do you perceive it?

Jason Kahn: The greatest aspect of improvisation for me is discovering a sound and a way of musically communicating with other people in a spontaneous situation. In improvisation I am first and foremost interested in this working process, of creating spontaneously. It is through this process that I find myself learning most about finding new ways of playing with others and of creating new sounds myself.

addlim.org: How do you perceive the relation between planning and spontaneity in improvisation?

Jason Kahn: In almost all cases when I improvise with others there is no discussion beforehand on how we will play. Even when improvising in a solo context I might at the most have an idea of how I will start. What proceeds from there on out will be determined as I go on playing.

addlim.org: Do you "practice" for an improvisation, and what are your general thoughts on the idea of "practising" for improvisation? When you improvise, do you use sounds that you've already "tried out", and how much room is there for actual sound experimentation?

Jason Kahn: I have never practiced for a performance in the context of free improvisation (i.e., improvisation without any pre-determined parameters). Practicing would be antithetical to my notion of a spontaneous discovery of sound and modes of playing. It would negate the very process I am most interested in.

When I improvise there are quite naturally certain sounds which I know how to play at any time. This is not a problem for me as part of the process of improvising is how these sounds interact with the sounds coming from the other musicians, where and when I choose to place them. What I have found, though, is that improvising puts me in a situation where I often discover new sounds. There is something about being in this precarious situation, where I sense the audience and the other musicians, which somehow pushes me to what you term here as "sound experimentation." Of course, working alone in my studio I can also discover new sounds but the approach is completely different. It is always very thrilling for me after a concert to realize I have stumbled across something new.

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

Jason Kahn: I have a very intuitive approach to improvised playing. For me to say whether one improvisation is better than another really just depends on how I feel, if the improvisation moves me.

I don't have a catalog of criteria which I check off to determine whether an improvisation is "good" or "bad."

And, as I mentioned before here, the process is most important for me. When this feels good then I am mostly satisfied.

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

Jason Kahn: Maybe when I was younger and had just started to record music I had this awareness. At this point, though, I don't really think about it. I record most of my concerts and when I compose I do all the recording myself. At some time any of this material could be a future release.