Paris Transatlantic
Interviewed by Dan Warburton
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What are your earliest musical memories?
Well, I've just been reading Alfred A. Tomatis' "Der Klang des Lebens", which explains the basis of the Tomatis Method, a form of sound and music therapy for different physical and psychological disorders. According to Tomatis, at four months of development an embryo's hearing capabilities are already fully developed. He devised a way of recuperating an opera singer's voice through the use of certain frequencies, which are supposed to represent the mother's voice as heard by the pre-natal child. So to answer your question, perhaps the first music I heard was what was being played in the Greenwich Village jazz clubs, like the Five Spot and the Village Vanguard, where my parents used to go before I was born [on May 3rd 1960]: Thelonious Monk, Eric Dolphy and John Coltrane. The first music I remember was the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show, and singing Beatles songs to my girlfriend at the time, whose name was Michelle. After my family moved to Los Angeles in 1964, the music I heard driving around in my parent's VW Bug was Top 40 stuff: The Mommas and Poppas, The Fifth Dimension, Burt Bacharach, Herb Alpert and The Tijuana Brass, The Beach Boys - I'm not talking psychedelic here - it all had a very light and airy feel to it, and synced with the time and place, with all the California sun shining in, or driving down Pacific Coast Highway smelling the sea air, or stuck in some hot traffic jam in the San Fernando Valley. From early on, then, music became attached to a place. During the 70's I listened to all the art and prog rock stuff - Henry Cow, Genesis, Yes, Hatfield and the North, Möbius, Eno, Roxy Music, King Crimson.. - and the song that pulled my head out of that was the Sex Pistols' "God Save The Queen". I remember hearing it on a radio show called "Rodney on the Rock" on the Los Angeles radio station KROQ, presented by an English DJ called Rodney Bingenheimer. He used to do live interviews with people like Joey Ramone, Sid Vicious and Darby Crash. The first time I heard "God Save The Queen" I was racing my mother's 1967 Ford Mustang on Mulholland Drive - I was so thunderstruck that I had to pull over and park the car. OK, so it probably wasn't so new to someone who'd already been listening to the Stooges or MC5 - which wasn't my case: the only concert I'd seen was Yes on their Roundabout tour - but for me it was a shock. Maybe it wasn't the music as much as the energy that attracted me, and the whole idea behind the punk scene at that time which was that anyone could make music. You didn't have to have two semi-trailer trucks, a dozen roadies, a private jet, a multi-million dollar record deal or a stadium to play in. So about 1978 I started going to Los Angeles punk clubs like the Whiskey, the Starwood and the Hong Kong Cafe. The scene was really vibrant and creative - there was everything going on from The Screamers to The Germs. It was a real revelation to me, seeing all these people on stage who looked just like me! The barrier between performer and audience completely disappeared.

When did you start making music yourself?
Not until 1981, apart from some earlier very unsuccessful attempts at playing the guitar. I can't say why I decided to play drums, but the moment I bought a set and started to play I knew that I'd found what I wanted to do in life. I immediately felt this great affinity with the drums, and would spend hours tuning them, trying to figure out how to make them sound. My ideal was to sound like Ed Blackwell on the Prestige recordings with Eric Dolphy and Booker Little at The Five Spot. This approach didn't fit well with most of the rock groups I was playing with at the time, though! I moved to London later that year to study British Colonial and African History for a year at the University of London (with a minor in Music) and I started taking drum lessons with John Taylor. I used to go to a drum shop in Soho once a week where John had his practice room in the cellar and we'd go over all these snare drum exercises. It was a kind of meditation for me - I could really zone out playing along to the metronome for hours. I had a rehearsal space in an abandoned

kitchen at Westfield College that was covered in ceramic tiles, so I had this amazingly reverberant drum sound. Looking back, that's probably where I first became interested in the amplified resonances of drums and cymbals.

Did you manage to see any good gigs while you were in London?
Yes, but I wasn't aware of the improvisation scene at all. Instead I saw The Fall, Gang of Four, New Order, Blurt and Rip Rig and Panic.. When I got back to Los Angeles I started a band with my girlfriend and when that fell apart I ended up playing with The Leaving Trains, who at that time were doing something similar to The Saints. They eventually recorded for SST and I came in contact with other musicians on the label. In 1985 I was living in The American Hotel, a renovated transient hotel in the warehouse district of downtown LA that rented rooms out to musicians, artists and people who worked in Al's Bar downstairs - someone should write a book about Al's Bar: it was very important for the Los Angeles punk scene of the time - and there I met guitarist Joe Baiza, who was living down the hall from me. I'd been getting interested in improvised music, jazz and the harmolodic music of that time - Blood Ulmer, electric Ornette Coleman, Ronald Shannon Jackson - and Joe's group Saccharine Trust, which had been moving in this direction, was breaking up. So we decided to start a band together, The Universal Congress Of. We recorded three records for SST before I left the group and moved to Europe in 1990. Around this time I was also playing in Cruel Frederick with reed player Lynn Johnston - the departure point for that group was ESP records, particularly Albert Ayler - and in an experimental rock group called Trotsky Icepick, which was more like Magazine or XTC. So I was very busy playing in different groups, and touring: the States, Canada and, in 1989, Europe. It was after that tour that I decided to move to Berlin.

Why Berlin?
The Wall had just come down and there was a real sense of urgency and jubilation in the air that I felt I had to experience and be a part of. When I moved there in the beginning of February 1990 the Berlin improv scene was thriving, especially in East Berlin. I played with people like Dietmar Diesner, Johannes Bauer, Connie Bauer, Ernst-Ludwig Petrowsky, Christoph Winckel, Günter Heinz, Sybille Pomorin and toured a lot in the DDR - while it still existed. A strange world far away from the bright Southern California sunshine I'd grown up in.

Why were you more drawn to the old East Germany?
That goes back to the concert I played in Leipzig with The Universal Congress Of about a month before the Wall came down. The response was really great - it was the biggest crowd of the tour. After that I visited a friend in Berlin, and we went to a small club in East Berlin to hear Connie Bauer, who did weekly concerts there. I was really amazed at how full the place was, how young the audience were, and how light the overall atmosphere felt. Connie was playing some pretty demanding music, but the audience listened attentively. The scene was totally mixed and open. I never felt that in West Berlin, which for me always felt like a dying city closing in on itself. The musicians there struck me as bored and spoiled after years living from the fat of West Berlin's heavy culture subsidies.

What about the improvised music scene with FMP?
FMP was still a force to be reckoned with, but it was an old boys' club of virtually the same people playing year after year together. I don't mean to sound dismissive here, as some of my favourite musicians - Paul Lovens, for example - belonged to this clique, but I found the whole FMP thing symptomatic of West Berlin and, to a certain extent, of West Germany as a whole: simply not open to change. I had the feeling that everyone was playing in a vacuum, oblivious to what was going on around them; I didn't sense any response to the energy in the street, the enthusiasm generated after the Wall came down. The techno scene had it, but FMP seemed oblivious to it. FMP was like a museum - albeit a good one.

How did your East German friends cope with reunification?
Many of the musicians I knew found life exponentially more difficult. The better-known ones continued to thrive, since they were already established internationally; but the less famous players found themselves confronted with having to "market" themselves and hustle for gigs and grants. A quite different situation from what they'd experienced before. Life in the DDR certainly wasn't peaches and cream, but it's true that after reunification many musicians lost their way. They were deprived of the status they'd enjoyed as "professional" musicians and didn't know how to sell themselves to agents and record companies. Clubs closed down too because they were no longer supported by the state and couldn't survive in a free enterprise economy. Despite all that, I found the East Germans much more open to newcomers like myself. They were curious and interested in playing with people from a different background. In West Berlin I got the impression that reunification had made musicians wary and suspicious, like they were thinking: "Oh no, not another drummer on the scene come here to take my gig!"

You were very active, but there's little of your work from that period available on disc..
No, between 1990 and 1992 I didn't record. I was really concentrating on playing live. In 1993 trombonist Günter Heinz invited me to record with him in the Akademie der Künste in East Berlin, and that came out on For4Ears in 1995. It's the only CD documenting my playing from this period. In fact, I was getting disillusioned with the free improvisation scene by the time this CD was released. I felt that many players weren't committed to playing outside of their repertoire of tricks, and nobody seemed to be interested in creating a group sound or working outside concert situations. Just turning up to the gig and playing a couple of sets wasn't enough for me - I wanted to work with other players on achieving a sound, arranging songs or approaching improvisation in a semi-structural way. So in 1994 I formed the group Cut with Hanover guitarist Birger Löhl. Our direction was something between This Heat, The Minutemen and Skeleton Crew. It was good to play compositions again and work on the fine details of arrangements and playing together.

Nowadays the city's improvised music scene is thriving once more. Were you aware of the beginnings of so-called New Berlin Reductionism while you were there?
Who thinks up these terms?! I guess you mean people like Axel Dörner, Michael Renkel, Burkhard Beins, Andrea Neumann, Annette Krebs... That style of playing seemed to appear a bit later - maybe around 1996 or so. I can't say for sure. I know all these people, of course, but I didn't really take their approach to playing. I watched it from the sidelines but I didn't actively pursue it. By that time I was already travelling quite a bit, and interested in other things. I'd been studying Arabic drumming (frame drum) with Syrian oud player Fahran Sabbagh. Oddly enough I got into that through my love of [Can drummer] Jaki Liebezeit; I'd read somewhere that he picked up a lot of his asymmetrical rhythms from listening to Middle Eastern music. I also liked the fact that in playing the frame drum you really concentrated on the minimum of sounds: the "dum" (bass sound) and the "tak" (high sound). It was about as stripped down as you could get, and reminded me of my love for the snare drum and its simplicity. Same thing with the tombak (zarb). I studied Iranian drumming in Paris with Madjid Khalaj In 1995, and was fascinated by the minimal / maximal possibilities of the instrument. So I suppose I was into a kind of reductionism, but of a different sort.

How did you hook up with Arnold Dreyblatt, and how did that encounter affect your subsequent development?
That was in 1994. Arnold's regular drummer Pierre Berthet couldn't do a project because his wife was expecting a baby. I'd been playing percussion with Druphad singer Amelia Cuni, who was the girlfriend (now wife) of Werner Durand, a saxophonist in Arnold Dreyblatt's group The Orchestra of Excited Strings. We did a weeklong production of Arnold's multi-media piece "Who's Who in Central and East Europe 1933" in Prague. The cimbalom player, Brazilian composer Chico Mello, soon left the group after this production and I was asked to fill his place. I can't say if this music affected my aesthetic as an improviser. What I played in Arnold's group really had more to do with

my experience playing in rock groups. The music had great drive but also tremendous energy and depth. It was intelligent, but never stuffy, and great fun to play. The combination of high volume and the swirling effect of the overtones from his just intonation tuning system all made for a very sensorial playing experience. He used conventional notation, but in most cases only the rhythms to be played in a pre-determined chord sequence were indicated. In some cases, it was left up to the musicians themselves to come up with the rhythmic parts and to notate them. Arnold was really concentrated on determining the harmonic movement of the music. His compositions went through a series of chords tuned in a harmonic system of just intonation. The length of each chordal section was never set exactly but, in most cases, cued by the drummer - myself or Pierre Berthet. In "Who's Who in Central Europe 1993" some of the sections were cued by events in the rest of the piece, in the video sequences or text or by the singer, Shelley Hirsch. Rhythm was really central to Arnold's music, and the drummer had to pace the pieces and decide when to move on to the next part. Not unlike many of the rock bands I played in, in fact. Arnold had a pretty good rhythmic feel himself and knew what kind of atmosphere he was after. When he started The Orchestra he used to play a modified upright bass, and I performed some concerts with him in duo and trio with The Orchestra's bassist Dirk Lebahn. The music was very strong, very primal. Around 1997 Arnold started using M, an interactive composition software programme popular in the 1980s, and his music became more complex - not necessarily less direct or rhythmic (or beautiful): but suddenly the drummer had to play very polyrhythmically (5/4 against 7/4, for example) as opposed to what Arnold used to refer to jokingly his "monorhythmic" music. Pierre did a great job playing those complex parts. Some of these pieces are out on a recent release from Table of the Elements called Point Source Lapse.

When did you first meet Toshimaru Nakamura?
In 1995 in Berlin, in a large group accompanying a Butoh dance performance organised by Tokyo saxophonist Manabu Kasugai. In early 1996 I went to Australia to play with Sainkho Namtchylak and stopped off in Japan on the way back to do a brief tour with Toshimaru and Manabu Kasugai. This was my first trip to Japan. I had some vague knowledge about some of the more famous Japanese noise musicians and I'd heard some of Otomo's work with Ground Zero, but apart from that I was quite ignorant and I think that worked to my advantage, as I had no expectations. I really didn't know what to think about Japan. Toshi was playing guitar then. Our first improvised concerts in 1996, before we started the project Repeat, were with me on drum set and Toshi on electric guitar. I went back to Japan in 1997 for two weeks to play with Toshi, Taku Sugimoto, Tetuzi Akiyama and Utah Kawasaki, and we had a great time hanging out together, going out for beers, going to record stores. You know, the normal things. Toshi and I recorded our first Repeat CD together. He was still pretty much guitar-based, but by that time I was using samplers. The big change for Toshi came when we toured Europe in the spring of 1998. He had the guitar with him, but he was playing it less and less. It became more of a sound generator than something to play melodies or chords with. He was concentrating more on developing a sound outside the realms of expressive playing, but still with the guitar. The mixing board came later. By the time we recorded our second CD on my third visit to Tokyo in October 1998 (Temporary Contemporary, For4Ears 1032) Toshi was only playing the mixing board. He'd just recorded Un with Sachiko M (Meme 011) shortly before our session.

You played yourself with Sachiko during that trip.
Yes, with Otomo, Sachiko and Toshi in Mandala 2, a club in Tokyo. It was also during this trip that the concert at Bar Aoyama was inaugurated, with Toshi, Taku, Akiyama and myself playing. [The Improvisation Meeting at Bar Aoyama was released on Nakamura's Reset label later that year] Akiyama had told Toshi about this bar in Shibuya at the mouth of a very loud multi-lane traffic tunnel. It looked more like a bunker than a nightspot. There weren't many people in the audience, but those that were there were really listening. That extremely active way of listening is something I've only really fully experienced in Japan. It was a way of listening that made it possible for us to play more quietly, concentrating more on sound and not on the gesture around sound. I never

had the sense that audiences would get nervous when nothing seemed to be happening. Of course, something was happening, but very gradually and on a different level. In 1999 my girlfriend and I travelled by train all the way from Geneva to Vladivostok and then on to Fushiki by ship. We had intended to move to Tokyo, but as it turned out we only stayed three months because she became pregnant and wanted to go back to Switzerland to have the baby. Oddly enough, while we were there most of my Japanese friends were away touring in Europe. We were staying in Taku Sugimoto's place and we had to look after his pet rabbits.. and let me tell you, they were loud!

While Taku's music is getting quieter and thinner all the time! How do you see more recent developments in the music of your Japanese friends?
Taku gave me some recordings of his duo with Radu Malfatti, but being as slow as I am, I haven't had a chance to hear them yet! I did see his guitar quartet, though, when I was in Tokyo this year. They played the first set of an evening; I played later solo. I imagine that what I heard is moving in similar terrain as the work with Malfatti. I don't have the feeling that Taku is trying to "thin" anything out. I'm not really sure if he even thinks in those terms. I have the feeling - and I can only speculate here as we don't often talk about music when we see each other - that he's going after a certain sound, really trying to get to the essential sound he wants to hear. I've heard some people say he wants to provoke and piss the audience off, but that sounds far too cynical and quite unlike the Taku I know. Also, why go to the trouble of going all the way to Europe just to piss people off when one could do that quite easily at home without having to play any music at all?!

In his interview with me a few years back, Radu Malfatti expressed dissatisfaction with the way he felt improvised music had stagnated, that rules had emerged. Don't you think that to some extent this is happening - or maybe already has happened - in today's so-called eai and onkyo music?
I think if you want to talk about "free improvised" music then the idea of rules just doesn't make much sense. As soon as there are rules you are not free. Schools of playing is another matter, as sometimes a certain school, a way of working, can arise out of a group of musicians working together with similar interests. Claiming that your school is more valid than others, though, is something I find a bit dubious. There are, of course, "masters", artists who have great depth of experience and expression in what they do, accrued over many years of practice. I doubt we can define it objectively, but we can often agree on people who might meet these criteria. I don't have a problem with that. The problem arises when the masters become high priests, and every word they utter becomes a law, truth. And it's a real problem when they start believing it themselves and telling other people what's right and wrong. I want to remain humble in what I do and keep my work in perspective of the greater scheme of things: there are so many people doing great work. I feel that each of us has to find our own truth in what we do. No one can tell us what this is; we have to discover it for ourselves. The solidifying of an "electro acoustic improv" genre doesn't surprise me, though I'm not sure how many of the musicians who play that kind of music would define themselves as "eai musicians". The same applies to the so-called "onkyo" genre: I've never ever heard anyone say "I'm an onkyo musician." These labels are often the result of marketing and media to promote and sell a sound. It can be advantageous for the musicians in terms of exposure, but it can also be a handicap, as they end up stuck with the nametag. I don't pay attention to such labels very much.

Don't you think it lacks some of that raw punk punch (with a few exceptions.. Pita, Karkowski..)?
I think this kind of music can have a directness of intent, without being "punchy". It's hard to define. What instantly comes to mind is, for example, Kevin Drumm's first solo release. That doesn't necessarily have "punch" but it has a fantastic sense of tension, which, for me at least, practically equates with what I would term the intent behind rock music. I agree with you about Pita and Karkowski. I had the pleasure of playing at the same festival with them in Athens two

years ago. What I really liked about their concert was how they just went for it - no safety net. The high volume wasn't the decisive factor for me; it was the energy, the directness. We later had dinner together and Pita was just raging on about Joy Division being the greatest band of all time. That made perfect sense for me, as his music really has the same energy and depth as groups from that era. I remember seeing The Fall in 1979 in Los Angeles. After the concert I literally felt electrified...and totally inspired.

Give us a brief history of the Cut label.
I started the label in 1997 to release the second CD by the group Cut. I still had that do-it-yourself approach instilled in me by Los Angeles punk and my experiences with the early 1990's Berlin techno scene. Many of my friends there were either DJ's or producers or running clubs (Panasonic, Friseur, Tresor, Elektro...), independently, without big labels or distributors. I was really infected by their energy. Of course, the music Ireleased had little to do with techno, but the energy behind the label definitely came from the sense of community I experienced in the Berlin techno scene. The second Cut CD was a co-release with Toshi's label Reset of the first Repeat recording, Repeat. After that, the label wasn't very active until I recorded my first two solo recordings in 1999, one involving acoustic drum set compositions (Cut 003 Drums and Metals) and the other field recordings and electronics (Cut 004 Analogues). I had all this music and I didn't want to spend a lot of time looking for someone to release it, so I did it myself. I managed to break even financially on those CDs and received some good reviews, so it was possible to continue. In 1999 Toshi and I recorded the third Repeat CD Select Dialect (Cut 005) in Caudeval, France at Studio Midi, the studio of Bob Drake, Maggie Thomas and Chris Cutler. That was released in 2000. About that time I started getting email from a great group in Italy with the unpronounceable name of Tu m'. [Emiliano Romanelli and Rossano Polidoro] who bombarded me with CDs and email until I decided to bring out their first CD .01. That was the first CD on Cut that I didn't play on. Cut 007 was my third solo recording, Plurabelle, which marks my first work with live computer processing and percussion. When I moved to Zürich there was so little going on musically that I decided to organise a series of concerts, "The Sonique Serie," which I held in various locations in the city for two years. Through those concerts I came in contact with many musicians, one of whom was Jason Lescalleet. He was scheduled to play in the Fall of 2001, but after 9/11 for various reasons the tour got cancelled. We stayed in contact, though, and I asked him to make a recording for Cut. Mattresslessness (Cut 008) was Jason's first solo release and it's one of my favourite Cut CDs. I really admire what Jason does because he works with sound from the inside out. He seems to go at sound like a sculptor goes at a piece of stone or clay, getting his hands dirty, taking the sound apart and looking at it three dimensionally, really paying attention to how the sound is working in an acoustic space. He doesn't seem to start with any preconceptions about what he wants to do - it's more like he sets up a system to work with the sound (old reel-to-reel decks, ancient effects boxes, etc.) and lets the system generate itself. He works with the outcome and builds with it. His work affects me on a very emotional level; it moves me. He's great to watch too: he's always moving around, from one machine to another, crawling around on the floor. We played together in Baltimore (that'll be released on Chloë this summer) and I really enjoyed it because there was no roadmap. I really had the feeling that the sound was unfolding around us, but that we weren't the central catalyst. It sounds more like a field recording than a concert. The sound is incidental, not directed, not performative; it's just there in the room and then at some point it's over. The idea of a "start" and a "stop" didn't seem applicable to me when we played together. In 2001 Toshi and I recorded what we decided would be the last Repeat CD (Cut 009) and to commemorate the event, we planned to work differently, recording basic material and then re-working it. All other Repeat CD's had been recorded live in studio. This one was entitled Pool, a reference to the pool of material we dipped into to compose with. Cut 010, Momentan_def., came about as more of a coincidence as anything else. I was having coffee one day with Ralph Steinbrüchel, who mentioned that he'd just played a concert in Zürich with Günter Müller and Tomas Korber. I missed the gig so I asked him for a copy of the recording. A week later he sent me a CD and I was really floored! I immediately asked if they had any plans to

release it, and, if not, would they like to bring it out on Cut. They agreed and added some remixes of the original concert material, and Cut 010 was born.

What about the graphics, the look of the label? You've consciously avoided both standard jewel boxes and digipak..
I hate jewel boxes. I figure that if someone is going to spend money on a Cut CD, they should at least get something special for it, not just some flimsy paper cover in a jewel box. I use heavy cardboard stock, to give a sense of "materiality", and all the covers are screen printed (sérigraphie). Screen printing, as opposed to offset printing, produces richer colours. There's also a "look" to screen printing which appeals to me. I'm more or less self-taught as a graphic artist; when I lived in LA I worked as a typographer and layout artist and designed many of the album covers and concert flyers of the groups I was playing in. Probably out of necessity, but it got me started.

What's next up for release on the label?
Cut 011, For the Time Being, is out now. It features John Hudak in two live settings both recorded last year in New York: one in concert with me, recorded in Michael Schumacher's Diapason Gallery, and one concert with Bruce Tovsky recorded at the Festival of Mixology at Roulette. John Hudak is one of those artists whose work I feel should be more widely known. I was thrilled to meet and perform with him. He has a very unique approach, which we both in a recent email exchange found analogous to the "sound of drying paint"! At Diapason we both played laptops. The Mixology recording features both John and Bruce on guitar, processed by computer. Cut 012, which should appear in the Fall of this year, is a composition by Taku Sugimoto entitled Music for Cymbal. The idea for this goes back to my last tour in Japan, when I asked Taku if he'd be interested in writing a piece for me. My plan was to send him recordings of a cymbal I use, which I play amplified on a floor tom. I sent him around 20 different soundfiles representing different regions on the cymbal where I play (and how I play: single strokes, rolls, long tones, short tones, etc.), and about nine months later he sent me the score. It's 70 minutes long and everything is timed. I'm free to choose which sounds on the cymbal I play, but I have to adhere to the dynamic and rhythmic indications. I premiered it in Tokyo earlier this year and I'll record it this summer.

Like Sugimoto, you seem to be getting more interested in composition yourself.
As it happens, I've just recorded a graphic score which I composed for Günter Müller, Norbert Möslang, Steinbrüchel, Tomas Korber, Christian Weber and myself. The piece is called "Timelines" and all playing takes place along a time axis. I see it not so much as a conventional composition for anonymous players but more as a live mix of my friends, as one might do on the computer in a mix program. I wanted to place their improvisations in a different context. Improvisation can thrive in many different contexts, from purely free to directed. A bebop musician's idea of improvisation, or even "free improvisation", will certainly be different from, for example, Peter Brotzmann's. I feel both approaches are valid for the people who practice them. I've played with some musicians who viewed composition, or even directed improvisation, as tantamount to a form of totalitarianism, with the composer acting as a kind of dictator, but that way of looking at things is too narrow for me. I don't feel that playing a composition deprives me of the freedom to express myself; it only provides me with a different way of placing my voice. You wouldn't say, for example, that Pablo Casals recordings of Bach's cello suites deprived Casals of his voice, would you?

Your recent Rossbin release Songs for Nicholas Ross seems to represent a move towards composition of sorts, using field recordings.
The source material was recorded in Amsterdam, Baltimore, Berlin, Caudeval, Lausanne, Los Angeles, New York, Paris, St. Pölten and Zürich. I used it to compose pieces close to how the original recordings sounded to me. I often think of that famous Morton Feldman quote: "Don't push sound around". I tried to keep that in mind as I composed these pieces. Many of them begin and end abruptly - there's a visual element to it, like a snapshot; and also a dialectical reason,

going back to the moment in which the recording was started and stopped. My focus in many of the original recordings, and in the final compositions too, was on sounds that hover just beyond the realm of our active field of listening. That doesn't mean sounds that are necessarily discreet or small: they could be machine sounds which at first hearing appear to be something natural (as opposed to "man-made"), or massive deep drones which our ears at first don't even register, because the frequency reaches us at a nearly subconscious level. In Los Angeles there are several valleys separated by ranges of hills. I used to enjoy going to the crests of these hills and listening to the city from above. For example, the San Fernando Valley where I grew up has an amazing low booming hum to it; but when we're down there in the middle of this we don't hear it at all (or we do hear it but not consciously). In many of the compositions on Songs for Nicholas Ross it may seem like nothing is happening at all, but on closer listening you notice many different audio events occurring.

Where did the idea for the disc come from?
Alessandro Bianco, who owns Rossbin, asked several people to compose a short piece for a CD-R to commemorate the wedding of two friends of his. The piece I sent him used field recordings, and he liked it so I asked if we couldn't perhaps do something similar for a longer release. Another one of Alessandro's ideas was to release a CD every year marking the birthday of his son, Nicolas Ross. Mine was to be the first in that series, hence "Songs for Nicolas Ross". "Songs" because I thought that little kids (Nicolas was two at the time of this recording) are so aware of sound and make no distinction between what is and is not music. I noticed this with my daughter Mira, who is now four. She makes an appearance on several tracks of the CD.

The sound material on Paper Cuts is also intimate, but unlike Songs it's a very indoor concept..
That came about when [percussionist and Crouton Music manager] Jon Mueller suggested a collaborative compositional project based on the sound of paper. He sent me a number of recordings he'd made of paper and I made some myself and sent them to him. Then I made shorter compositions from Jon's recordings and sent him those, and he added them to the original recordings and sent the whole thing back to me to compile the final mix. With all the back and forth, though, it was important not to lose sight of the original source material, not to leave the original source of the concept - paper - behind in a sea of digital sound processing. What processing we did was to enhance the inherent properties of the material we were working with; we used the computer to magnify and go deeper into the sounds of the paper we recorded. Taking very quiet sounds and magnifying them greatly, bringing the background to the foreground, or taking louder paper sounds (shredding, crumbling) and inverting their orientation in the mix. The composition isn't just about paper, but about expanding our field of listening.

Which is also a good description of Miramar.
The title is Spanish for "sea view", and it's also a personal pun, as my daughter is named Mira - hearing the light refract from the waves and imagining the sound currents as gradual undulation of ebb and flow. I wasn't a beach boy, but I did grow up in Southern California and spent a lot of time down at the beach. I always loved that late afternoon feeling, staring out at the water and watching the sunlight dance from the crests of the waves and the gentle variations of the water further out from shore where the ocean gradually merges into one great blue mass. For me, the music on Miramar has many similarities with how the ocean looks when we spend a long time gazing out at it.

But it wasn't recorded at the seaside!
No, it was a kind of sound installation in the studio. I recorded it at Studio Midi again, which is an old converted barn with 20 metre high ceilings. That means there are many possibilities, especially when playing sufficiently loud, to record different fields of frequencies in the outer reaches of the room. Whenever I perform with this particular set-up (percussion, analogue synthesizer) the

room I play in is one of the deciding factors in terms of what I can do: how deep I can go, what frequencies of feedback will create standing waves, and so forth. In recording Miramar I tried to merge my sound with the sound of the room, and to work with it to create my sound. Another thing about Studio Midi is there's also a huge glass door that takes up practically an entire wall, which allows you to work in daylight, and it's quite pleasant to react to the changing light conditions. I've done many recordings there, and the feeling towards the end of the day is, naturally, quite different from when you start early in the morning. It really wasn't until I started to record at Studio Midi that I truly began to understand why Indian music has ragas for different times of the day and different seasons of the year. The last piece on the CD was recorded towards the end of the day and, to me at least, really sounds like this - light fading, the day moving on into night.

As day moves into night and we get all nostalgic, I suppose I could be sadistic and ask you for your all time Top Ten, or at least today's Top Ten..
This is one of those impossible demands made on unwitting interviewees! Well, here are ten recordings I have listened to a lot over the years (in alphabetical order). But there could be so many more.. The Beach Boys Pet Sounds, John Cale Paris 1919, Nick Drake Five Leaves Left, Genesis The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway, Joni Mitchell Blue, Steve Reich Four Organs, Todd Rundgren The Ballad of Todd Rundgren, This Heat This Heat, The Velvet Underground The Velvet Underground (third LP), Scott Walker Scott 3. And if you want ten that I'm really enjoying now (also listed in alphabetical order): Asuna Each Organ , Magali Babin Chemin de Fer, Tomas Korber Mass Production , Sachiko M, Sean Meehan Untitled , Mirror Solaris, Takefumi Naoshima Music for Speakers, Seth Nehil & Olivia Block Sunder, Unite, Max Neuhaus Fontana Mix-Feed, Paul Panhuysen A Magic Square of 5 to Look At, Eliane Radigue Geelriandre-Arthesis.

Tell us about your forthcoming projects.
There are some new recordings which are scheduled to be released this year: Blinks with Günter Müller is due out in September on For4Ears, the recording of the concert in Baltimore with Jason Lescalleet I mentioned, entitled Red Room, will be released by Chloë in August, and another live recording with Utah Kawasaki and Tetuzi Akiyama (the first one with that trio came out on Rossbin in 2001) called Ailack will appear on Creative Sources later this year. In the early part of 2005 a duo CD with Tetuzi Akiyama will be released on For4Ears.Then I have some contributions on remix projects from The New Blockaders, Fear of God and Ilios (on Antifrost). There are some other finished recordings which I don't have a home for yet, including a trio with Tomas Korber and Dieb13, another with Kim Cascone and Steinbrüchel and a duo with Ilios. I plan to start a new solo recording this summer and I'm also working on a new sound installation for the International Festival of Electronic Art 404 in Argentina in December.

How do you see your work developing in the long term?
It's hard for me to foresee where my work is going. I feel I'm in the middle of something, being swept along but also determining where I'm going. Sometimes I get a glimpse of things up ahead but I'm not really interested - I want to be in the moment of what I am doing and concentrate on my interests as they unfold daily. Looking ahead would just distract me. I often think about my own future as a musician, and ask myself why it's necessary or interesting to order sound - aside from my own private inner drive - when there is already so much great sound in the world here for us to listen to. But as music is a means of communication, transporting ideas and feelings through the organisation of sound, I imagine the real point is not how much sound there already is out there, but how much I have to communicate. Maybe one day I'll run out of things to say. Then the music will stop