

All the Blest for Now

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It was the summer of 1982 and I was back home in Los Angeles after a year living in London. I had a roommate who had the good fortune of seeing Z'ev perform in San Francisco in 1978. He raved about this from time to time and got me curious about this mysterious figure. From his description it seemed like Z'ev's shows were pretty wild, to say the least. Then one day, during one of my weekly forays to Rhino Records in Westwood, I came across an LP of Z'ev's in the used bins. This was *Salts of Heavy Metals*. The cover looked like a scene out of some ultra-dystopic science fiction movie, where the inmates have escaped the asylums and are running amok through decaying cities, hurling junk metal around on a violent rampage. On the back cover a close-up photo of a pair of cut and scraped hands testified to the frenzy on the front cover. Of course, I had to buy this record and for once the Rhino salesclerks didn't scowl or snicker at my purchase.

Adding to the near constant rotation of John Coltrane's *Interstellar Space* and The Fall's *Hex Enduction Hour*, *Salts of Heavy Metals* completed a kind of holy trinity for my listening that summer. Yet, unlike Coltrane and The Fall, whose contexts I understood, *Salts of Heavy Metals* left me dumbfounded. Was this performance art, a kind of real-time kinetic sound sculpture? Music? I couldn't place where Z'ev was coming from. It wasn't so much that he was pushing boundaries as completely obliterating them. There was a kind of wild freedom implicit in what he was doing. I felt that whatever place the inspiration for *Salts of Heavy Metals* came from, I wanted to get there too.

In 1990 I moved to Berlin. Self-destructing Einstürzende Neubauten were still a big thing, though I was never interested in seeing them play. I even ended up working with some of the members in different projects, but somewhere in the back of my mind I knew that I would be disappointed hearing them live. I guess that I had a chip on my shoulder and felt they'd co-opted Z'ev's vision and turned it into some spectacle. In 1993 Z'ev was invited to Berlin for a festival organized by drummer Peter Hollinger, who also in my opinion owed much of his approach to Z'ev's pioneering work. But I was unfortunately out of town for the show.

It seemed I would never get the chance of seeing Z'ev perform, which over the years had become a kind of holy grail for me. He was this mythical figure in my mind, a link between the wreckage of futurist industrialism, kabbalistic wisdom and a totally unique assimilation of numerous traditions of world percussion. I was at this time myself studying Arabic, Turkish and Iranian drumming and fascinated by the work of Jaki Liebezeit and Charles Hayward. It seemed like seeing Z'ev was the final piece missing in my puzzle.

By 2000 I was living in Zürich. One day I received an email from Z'ev! I'm not sure anymore of the exact details, but I think he was looking for a place to play in Zürich, which, unfortunately, I was in no position to help with as my first daughter had just been born and I was completely preoccupied with this. But he did end up sending me a copy of his treatise *Rhymajik*, which I read through eagerly but, I'll have to admit, much of it went over my thick head. We fell out of touch again until 2008 when he sent me another email, asking about us collaborating for a couple of shows in Switzerland. Wow! I mean, really WOW!

I managed to organize four concerts for us. But when Z'ev arrived in Zürich I was a bit worried. He was having trouble walking, breathing, hearing... This was the artist's life on the fringes of the underground, without health insurance, a hand-to-mouth existence. Not as romantic as some people might think. But when we set up and did the soundcheck for our first gig in Zürich, I knew that I had nothing to worry about. Because, despite all his health problems Z'ev was still indelibly, undeniably, incredibly Z'ev. The concert was great. And what can I say without making this sound sentimental or esoteric? But when Z'ev got into it, into his sound, into the music, we definitely went to another place. Through his very presence, Z'ev created a transcendental space. I felt after the gig as I though I'd gotten a glimpse of something deeper. And it suddenly hit home what I'd sensed all those years ago when I first put my copy of *Salts of Heavy Metals* on the turntable and gotten transported to this very same place. It was like the eternal resonance of Z'ev's sound and presence and energy reaching out to me over all those years and back, a continuum of inspiration which I felt the moment we started to play.

The last time I saw Z'ev was in Nantes, France in April 2014. He'd been living there after some very unfortunate immigration mishaps in England. We were both playing on the same festival. I finally had the opportunity of hearing Z'ev solo. He seemed much older and his health hadn't really improved, yet what he played that evening exceeded all my expectations. But beyond this, the best part for me was being able to hang out with Z'ev again. The way he reeled out stories of seeing Captain Beeheart or Jimi Hendrix, or jamming with some proto-psych band way back when before anyone knew who Z'ev was, sweating it out in a sun-baked garage out on the nether reaches of the San Fernando Valley, stoned and free and young.