

**"Things Fall Apart"**  
**Liner Notes to a solo CD from Jason Kahn**  
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Back in 1981 I was studying at the University of London in the School of African and Asian Studies. One lecturer had us read Chinua Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart." Aside from the book moving me immensely, the title stuck with me all this time. And for the past couple of years I've been turning these words over in my mind, as they seemed to speak so much about what is falling apart around us, in terms of social structures, economies, the environment, even whole nations.

Often when I start thinking about a new work I begin with a title. The sound of the words or their meaning give me a sense of direction to work in. Chinua Achebe died in March this year, and perhaps his passing prompted me to finally get working on this CD. But though I felt these words spoke to me, I still couldn't get a grasp on what they were saying.

The novel "Things Fall Apart" deals with the imposition of British colonial rule over a region in Nigeria and the eventual demise of that society, where, quite literally, everything that bound the indigenous populations together through religion, culture and family falls apart. For me, though, I wanted to apply the words "things fall apart" to a way of working, or, perhaps more accurately, not working. What happens when our preconceived notions, all our carefully laid-out plans, even the place we choose to work, fall apart? When in the moment it seems we have finally begun only to find that we have to start over again, forget all our clever ideas and re-think from that moment on to the next? When things falling apart becomes the creative process in itself and this lack of cohesion offers the clearest path to discovering something new?

This was the situation which faced me when I arrived at the Kunstraum Walcheturm to start recording. The Kunstraum Walcheturm is an art space located in the center of Zürich, not far from the main train station. The building itself belongs to a former Swiss army barrack, built around a large courtyard spreading out in front of the Kunstraum Walcheturm, which used to house the army's stables. The room I recorded in is large: 320 square meters with a 3.80 meter high ceiling. Both floor and ceiling are of wood, giving the room very warm acoustics, aside from the fact that the floor creaks tremendously when one walks over it! I've performed many times in this room, heard many concerts there and know its sound very well—or at least I thought I did.

A few years ago I used the room to record two pieces for the cassette "Walcheturm" on the Banned Production label. At that time, though I was attracted to the sound of the room, I think my primary concern was to just have a quiet place to record in. Patrick Huber, the director of the space, recently offered it to me again during a pause in his production schedule. In fact, only a very short pause of one day. So I took this as an opportunity, with what I thought were all my ideas ready to realize.

Arriving the evening before to set up my instruments and recording gear, everything was quiet. For once, the adjoining restaurant didn't have a disco going or some boisterous event. The sounds of the city barely registered from outside. Unfortunately, it was late and I was too tired to start recording. I decided to return in the morning and get an early start.

When I arrived the next day, the first thing I noticed was the many horse-drawn wagons parked directly in front of the Kunstraum Walcheturm and all around the courtyard. Zürich's annual Sechseläuten parade was about to start in a few hours and the courtyard provided a convenient place to park the horses and wagons until the parade got rolling. The jingling of all the horses' bells and their insistent neighing and whinnying filled not only the courtyard but

the inside of the Kunstraum Walcheturm as well. Obviously, there was no way I could start recording now. Instead, I decided to walk around and make recordings of the ambiance there, hoping I might use this for the CD. I'd originally been thinking of just using this day recording as a means of collecting material to compose with later. The idea of recording complete pieces direct and unedited wasn't on my agenda at this point.

I finished recording and went to grab a coffee. When I returned, the horses and wagons were gone but now a huge wedding party was slowly filling into the restaurant next door. And this wasn't just any wedding party, but a Tamil wedding party, complete with a band and what looked like at least a couple hundred guests! It seemed now that things were truly falling apart for me, as when this party got going I would surely not be able to record anything except maybe the party itself. But, amazingly, the party wasn't that loud and deep in the recesses of the Kunstraum Walcheturm's main room I was able to start working.

Walking around the room alone now I slowly felt how the acoustics of the space and the sensation of being there cast something akin to a spell over me. The idea of just collecting a bunch of material to work with later now seemed completely irrelevant. I decided that I wanted to work with the room, activating the space with my sounds and in turn letting the space activate me with its atmosphere and acoustical possibilities.

The pieces on this CD were recorded "as is," which is to say I didn't re-work them. Just some basic equalization and editing off the empty space before and after each piece's beginning and end. None of these pieces were planned, which doesn't mean "improvised" (though they were) but that in most cases I really didn't have any preconception of what I wanted to do over the course of the day, instead letting my intuition and the room itself guide me from one piece to the next. The idea of working with my voice really only occurred to me as the experience of spending so many hours in the space began to grow on me. I felt prompted to use my voice, that the space practically demanded this from me. When the party next door finally dispersed later in the evening, I was left with a very silent space—which made it possible to do some of the quieter takes on the CD. The piece "Night" was the last piece I recorded that day.

So, yes, in the end many things fell apart here: the actual feasibility of the recording space, my ideas for working—even to the point that I tried approaches which I'd never pursued before. Much fell apart but in the end this collection of pieces miraculously came together.