

My (short) story

I am a Canadian clarinetist who embraces pretty much any music where the clarinet is present, or has a bit of profile or history. Although I am classically trained, I have not followed the traditional career path associated with the kind of classical training I came out of.

I studied at McGill University with Emilio Iacurto (the legendary, long-time principal clarinetist of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra) and at Yale University with Keith Wilson (whose contribution to the clarinet world is unparalleled). I've had the privilege of participating in masterclasses with some of the world's finest clarinet players, including David Shifrin, Richard Stoltzman and Alan Hacker. I also had the privilege of studying and working with William O. Smith/Bill Smith throughout the 90's. Bill was a mentor and inspiration for me to pursue my own voice.

It was Alan Hacker who first opened the door for me to explore new technical and musical possibilities on the clarinet. Having been part of Fires of London and a close collaborator with composers such as Peter Maxwell-Davies, Alan's insatiable curiosity and deep scholarship inspired me to look for my own personal approach. Following a brief visit to his home in the UK in the late 80's I spent some time in Paris practicing and researching clarinet new music repertoire. At that time I still didn't know what I was going to do with my life, except that I had a deep desire to "make it" in the music scene. It was during this period that I discovered the music of Steve Lacy.

Steve Lacy's career actually began as a dixieland clarinetist, eventually shifting to the soprano saxophone, an instrument very few jazz musicians had investigated since the great Sydney Bechet due to its range, smaller embouchure and faulty intonation. Steve dedicated his life to bringing this instrument at the forefront of creative music (legend has it that he turned John Coltrane on to the soprano's expressive qualities).

At the time I had one occasion of hearing him play live at the New Morning jazz club, and bought a newly released duo recording called "Paris Blues" (Owl Records, 1987) with the great Gil Evans on piano. Heading back to Canada, that was the only music I could listen to for quite a while, being transfixed by Lacy's and Evan's telepathic playing. It was the first time that I had found a jazz performance that rivalled with the finest chamber music making I was then more familiar with. It was a game changer as far as I was concerned. It opened the door for further exploration and discoveries; Anthony Braxton, John Carter, Jimmy Giuffre, all important figures in the development of creative music on the clarinet. It is interesting and deplorable to note that not once were these names ever mentioned in all my years of university clarinet seminars and lessons. It was only a few years later that he agreed to meet with me for one on one lessons at his Paris apartment. His main advice to me was to stick with the clarinet, and forge ahead with my musical thoughts and ideas, no matter how difficult the road ahead may be.

After a stint at the Banff Centre, where I worked on my technique and practiced improvisation (the centre has a great library with an extensive jazz and creative music collection), I relocated to Vancouver in the winter of 1989, where I began playing on the creative music scene and met many musicians who eventually became fantastic collaborators; Claude Ranger, Roger Baird, Tony Wilson, amongst many others. At the time, the New Orchestra Workshop Society was approaching its golden years, with the founding of the legendary Glass Slipper, the "go to" venue for creative music on the West Coast. The Vancouver Jazz Festival was well on its way to establishing itself as one of the most innovative international music happening, not only

programming some of the biggest names in the business, such as Miles Davis and Wynton Marsalis, but also the most creative musicians on the planet; Cecil Taylor, Evan Parker, John Zorn, Dave Douglas, Anthony Braxton, William Parker, and a whole sleuth of European 1st generation of improvisors such as Misha Mengelberg, Han Bennig, ICP, AMM, and the Italian Instabile Orchestra. It was at the 1992 Jazz Festival that I had my first high profile gig, my first band "Et Cetera" sharing the bill with the Steve Lacy Sextet!

As I was making my first steps in the improvised community, I also became involved with the contemporary music scene, collaborating with composers such as John Oliver and Paul Dolden, as well as freelancing with established organizations; Vancouver New Music, Vancouver Pro Musica. In 1992 I became a founding member of the Standing Wave ensemble. My activities in both creative music and new music allowed me to forge a strong profile, eventually expanding to collaborations with international musicians, and getting international touring opportunities. Some long standing collaborations were forged during that fruitful period, with luminaries such as Benoît Delbecq and Joëlle Léandre among others. Bill Smith was the artist that taught me how to bring the worlds of improvised music, jazz, and new music together. This synthesis of genres is what defines my artistic pursuits; I have been constantly involved in the advancement of creative music, seeking collaborative projects with composers and musicians of all persuasions. My work continues to test these stylistic boundaries, looking for new vistas and connections with listeners everywhere.

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