

No silence, no sound

Witold Wachowski

Translation: Nelly Strehlau

She went to India to look for her true self, but all she came back with was a pair of sandals (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 284). In other words: the conventional ways of reaching the essence or the true nature of anything are futile. This perspective is close to Zen: that particular strand of Buddhism, in which the (problematic) reality is consistently reduced almost to nothingness (Suzuki 1979; Scott and Doubleday 1995; Kozyra 2004). Zen is also close to the views of our musical guest, Mateusz Walerian.

And this was also the original premise of our discussion: ascetic minimalism. Its title could then have been: *Not a word about music*. It was supposed to be about the sandals, without which one cannot set off towards the musical truth – meaning simply making and listening to music. The questions should then have boiled down to the technical aspect of music as well as embodying and situating its production, and to the methodical basis of improvisation. The intended effect was thus: a clear atmosphere without gratuitous spirituality or symbolism, and instead, crisp artefacts, dry descriptions, physical characteristics of the described phenomena. And only in this wasteland of a workshop was there supposed to be a spark ignited, perhaps, in contact with the readers.

Did that not work out as intended? I would say, something else has occurred. In our Zen stone garden the spark ignited of its own accord; what turned up were cats, budo masters, astronauts; reminiscences and emotions played side by side with artefacts. This was largely influenced by the uncompromising attitude of my interlocutor and his erudition – which is partly why adding any philosophical or scientific superstructures to the interview would necessarily seem rather garish. *Let us ask ourselves, how*

many generations of professors these people [musicians – ed.] you are talking about have educated through their works of art (Mateusz Walerian 2011) – thusly does Mateusz Walerian comment on the question of the musicians' education, significantly going beyond both academic and popular notions thereof.

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Mateusz Walerian. Born in Poland. Jazz instrumentalist and composer. Alto saxophonist and woodwind player [bass clarinet, bb clarinet, flute]. Studying: music, Eastern philosophy and Japanese culture. The character of his style places him firmly in the mainstream of modern jazz and improvised music, close to hard free bop with a touch of the atonal avant garde heritage. Classical music, jazz classics and the Oriental sound [classical music of Japan and India] have all left a distinctive impression on his creative output. Mateusz Walerian cooperates in diverse musical projects with musician representing various music genres spanning from jazz, classical and contemporary music to improvised avant garde music and electronica. Mateusz Walerian is the author of such musical projects as Mateusz Walerian Trio, Sainthunter, Trio Lotus, Zen, Blackadmin or Demiurge Droppin'Acid. In his projects, Mateusz Walerian combines classical chamber music, jazz classics and Oriental scales with the contemporary sound of improvised music. He is also the art director of the concert series OKUDEN MUSIC: *sound_to_the_deepest*.

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Interview

After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music

[Aldoux Huxley¹]

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Witold Wachowski: First of all, you're a saxophonist but you also play the bass clarinet and other instruments. Can you describe what it is you require from an instrument and what an instrument requires from you?

Regarding the first question: I mean, do you think about music "as a saxophonist", do you compose or sketch an idea from the beginning while playing an instrument? Do you know the limitations of an instrument such as the saxophone, or is there still some mystery to it?

Mateusz Walerian: My journey with music started with the study of the grand piano at a very young age, fortunately or unfortunately - it's hard to say – at home during private lessons. It allowed me a comfortable condition to acquaint myself with music without pressure or dogma, which is common in public education. From the very start I could study according to a curriculum that fully met my requirements. Mostly it was pieces ranging from jazz miniatures, blues harmonies and a whole lot of compositions in boogies style. Even today I have a fondness for this style as it shows well a certain part of my personality.

My main instrument is the alto saxophone. It's very important instantiation because the level of resemblance between the alto and tenor sax is like for example that between the flugelhorn and the tube. The difference isn't caused only by the instru-

¹ The motto has been placed here on a special request of our Guest (source: <http://www.quotedb.com/quotes/1165>, 23.03.2011).

ment's tune. The selection of a certain saxophone implies its use. It will be better shown by an example of other tools, let's say that the tenor and alto sax are like a machete and a scalpel. It's impossible to appraise. Different tools, different phrasing peculiarity, different stylistics of utterance. Many saxophonists play simultaneously on a few different types of sax. The most common combination is the tenor and soprano sax. Because their tune is identical (Bb) and this type of compilation enables one to widen the scale without the necessity of transposition. Practically this comes down to playing on a single "two-part" instrument.

I was looking for means of utterance in high register and chose the clarinet Bb. This choice was dictated by my stylistic preference. For a long time now I've been fascinated by the oriental culture (not only music) especially with Indian and Japanese classical music. The traditional scale and harmony that accompany them are conveyable in a great way by this instrument. Deeper study of the Japanese classical music and of the minimalism that is essential to this culture (not only to music) led me to introducing a third instrument, that is, the Western concert flute.

The bass clarinet is my latest attempt to widen my stylistic scope. While composing or improvising I often create so-called soundscapes. The bass clarinet is passionately used for example in film scores where the sound sets the mood of a given space. It has a magnificently low and deep sound, which is best characterized by a hypothetical combination of clarinet Bb with aboriginal didgeridoo. This instrument also allows me to move in low registers since the other instruments sound rather high.

The limitations of an instrument are an interesting issue. The examples of genius such as John Coltrane or Eric Dolphy show that it's hard to speak about boundaries of sound. Although they died at a very young age (40 and 36 years respectively), the music they left and the space that lies beyond it (which, because of their early deaths, they couldn't fill) suggest that there are no limits. I've been listening to Coltrane's or Dolphy's music for almost 20 years, and with each year I understand it better and reassure myself in the belief that even such a simple instrument as a saxophone or a clarinet (because of its single melodic line) has no limitations. Creations of such contemporary masters of the saxophone as Rob Brown allow us to realize that, even 50 years after the deaths of the last messiahs of this instrument, its sound space is still open.

Let's go back to what the instruments require from you: could you please describe what your work with breathing while playing looks like, how your health and other surrounding factors influence the performance.

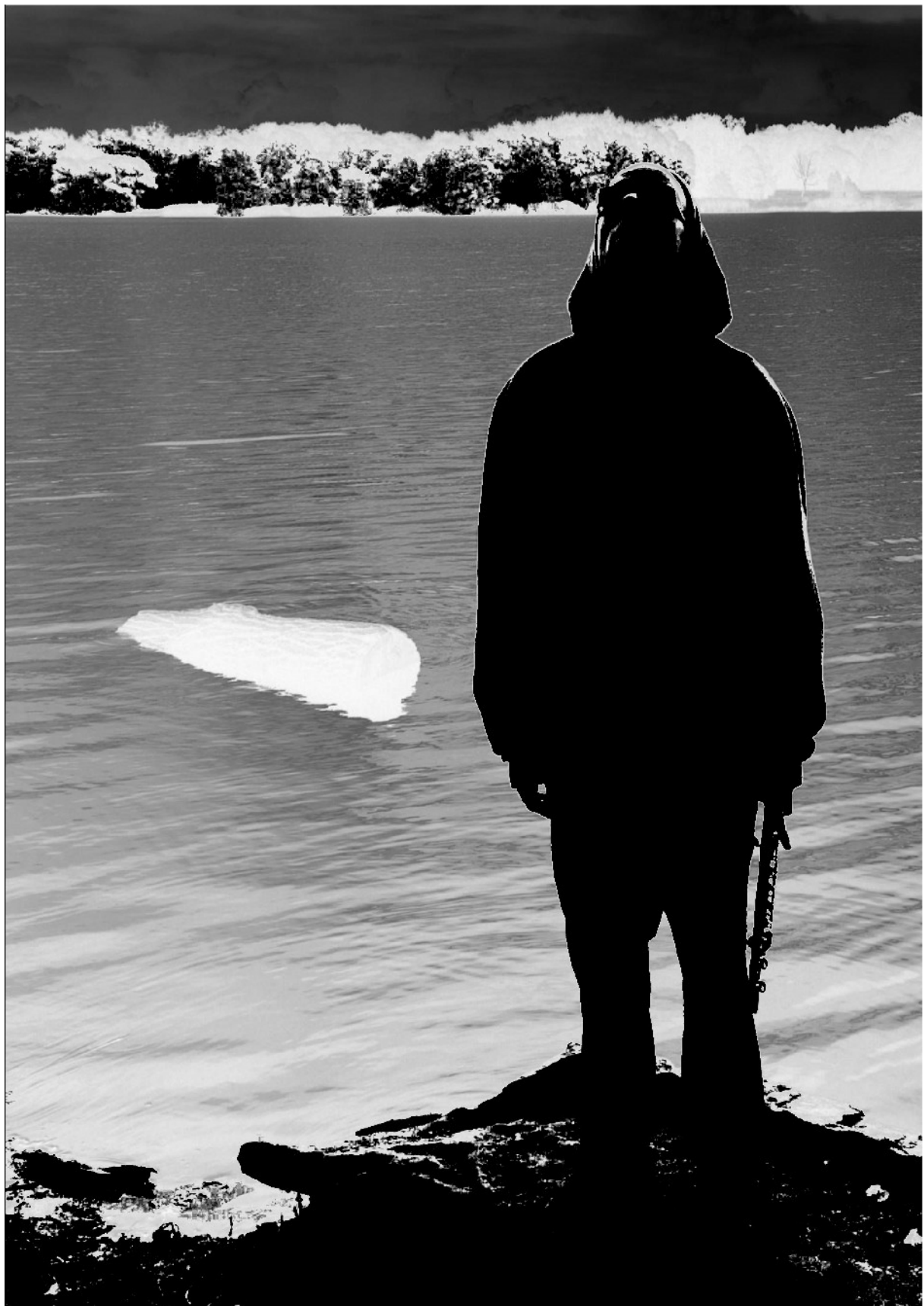
Breathing determines the whole phenomenon of playing a wind instrument. The saxophone is exceptional regarding the timbre. It's probably the only instrument allowing such a wide sound variation. Right now I can't think of any other acoustic in-

strument with such a wide possibility of personalizing the tune. Breath and so-called blast are here the main factors responsible for the process of sound creation. Playing a wind instrument (and not only) is best shown by a sport metaphor. Efficiency of a “competitor”, which means his/her achievements, is influenced by all factors – constitution and physical as well as psychological health. The environment is also an essential factor, which in fact comes down to psycho-physical condition.

And what about more down-to-earth issues, such as your instrument maintenance, its life and quality...

The maintenance of an instrument such as the saxophone (while used properly of course) isn't problematic. If we sincerely use the instrument practicing regularly, issues related to regulating the mechanism arise. Once every few years the leather cushions located on the inner part of every flap need to be replaced. Saxophone is definitely one of longest-living instruments. Now I'm playing a contemporary Japanese instrument (Yanagisawa) because it's undisputedly the best in the world. I also possess in my collection a cult model of Conn Chu Berry from the best period of production (before World War II). After purchase it didn't even require renovation. It's commonly believed that old saxophones (mostly American) have a better sound. That's rubbish. It is necessary to buy a good instrument. I've tested all the models of all the best producers. Yanagisawa is unrivalled, it's in a class of its own. It's hard to make a comparison here. The difference between this brand of saxophone and the ones of rival companies (German, French or British) is like the difference between those countries' traditional weapons and the Japanese sword. It's a real shame they only produce saxophones.

Clarinet, because of the wood it's made of, is a much more troublesome instrument. However, if used properly, it can serve for years. Clarinets which I play (bass and Bb) originate from the 60's and in my opinion they have unrivalled sound compared to ones produced nowadays. In the past another type of wood was used. The models which I possess have a slightly enlarged diameter, thanks to which they provide a darker, fuller sound. As in the case of the clarinet, older instruments can have better sound properties, but in the case of a saxophone this rule doesn't always work. The older saxophones can of course have a magnificent sound, however, the technology of that time didn't allow for the creation of two identically perfect copies of one model. While buying an old instrument it comes down to luck. Even in the case of an instrument which sounds good, the differences in the mechanism's work – compared to the model mentioned above – will always be overwhelming. It's like comparing the technology of cars from the 40's to those produced nowadays. However, in this case, the design didn't change, so driving a beautiful and stylish “piece of junk” is at least disputable. For some that's undoubtedly enough.



I'm interested in some issues related to the surrounding in which you play, and to the audience that shares those surrounding with you. Firstly I would like to mention the already well-known "light scandal" from a recent concert where you performed with Hamida Drake and Timothy Dahl. It was a very intriguing concert, after which some participants expressed their disapproval of ...too bright lighting of the concert hall. It was necessary for video documentation, however, it prevented some of the listeners from the expected submersion in the comfortable semi-darkness . When trying to defend them, we can point out here the imagination-influencing properties of darkness, the possibility of turning off here the supposedly unnecessary sense of sight. On the other hand, this offered to people a possibility of a precise, almost clinical insight into the music's technical "kitchen" and in an aesthetical, harmonically designed hall at that. Could you, from a distance, offer a comment on - - the differences in perspective?

This phenomenon is, at the very least, amusing. Several aspects are involved in this kind of perception. First of all – jazz is associated with a club atmosphere. Jazz is also often treated as a background music for getting pleasantly wasted in a better or worse company. In our case the term jazz is a little unfavorable. We can play jazz. We can play even more than jazz. I love jazz. I'm not going to – in any case - depreciate this genre by stating something like those reality-falsifying con men who usurp the right to call themselves "Avant-garde" with a capital A. It often happens this way, because people who represent this environment simply can't play jazz the classic way and have to "adjust theory to the circumstances". We are musicians who improvise and as such, we play improvised-music. Jazz is a kind of music that possesses an element of improvisation. The modern improvised-music possesses an element of jazz or rather, due to its characteristics - includes jazz. It's a step forward, it's a sound culture commonly considered the music of our times. Jazz possesses its own harmony, way of phrasing, characteristic composition. Modern improvised-music arose as a resultant of jazz, classical music, modern music and also ethnic or electronic music. It's a completely new quality, that has evolved over decades and which right now is in full bloom. Naturally, it's conducive to the existence of impostors and frauds, who claim to be original while presenting copied forms of expression. Due to its specificity this type of fraud is difficult to detect for most people, since it simply consists in classifying this kind of music as avant-garde. Let's consider concerts of classical music, modern-music or at least open-air ones (jazz and others) that occur during the day. Do we have here darkness or a convivial way of perceiving art that is associated, for example, with cigarette smoke and drunken atmosphere? Some people have problems with attentive listening, not only to music. Some, while going to a con-

cert, expect a musical feast, a show but sometimes they have nothing to offer in return. What can a musician expect from the audience? Only a little bit of respect that is expressed through attentive listening to the conveyed content. If we don't care what the artist wants to communicate, why do we occupy space with our presence in the first place? Some people can't listen. They don't want to know, they are afraid of development. Many listeners stopped in their musical growth at projects realized almost half a century ago. The particular concert atmosphere - which you mentioned above – required attentive listening to the presented content. The character of our projects places presented music in the sphere of high art. If a problem with perceiving occurs then the listener has only himself/herself to blame. Maybe in that case some should change their musical interests, or simply grow up?

Staying on the subject of physical factors and surrounding, do you recall any performance (official or not) where the exterior conditions like the acoustics, the temperature or the weather, the activity of a part of the audience or the even color of someone clothes played an important role – whether it was only for the musicians or for the audience as well? On the other hand - maybe some problem with the instrument?

Modern improvised-music derives from all dimensions. This is also the case with jazz. Self-respecting creators have always corresponded to the atmosphere during the concert. In our case it's not about imposing our point of view on the audience. On the other hand, the concert isn't played for the musician or for the audience but for the music. While performing, we propose to take the listeners on a journey and not everyone has to like it. They can get off at any moment. The exterior conditions are of a great importance. There is a different effect to an outdoor concert than to one in a concert hall. Inadequate acoustic conditions prevent the presentation of many aspects due to, for example, the lack of audibility. It's hard to present content without stating it. The temperature... In a low temperature instruments don't tune... The audience's behavior can considerably affect the final outcome. If there is feedback, it becomes a "self-propelling circle" with advantages for everyone.

What is the difference between a rehearsal and a concert? Or is it only a conventional difference? When I asked you after concert how many rehearsals you had had you said...none. Could you explain this "miracle"?

Miracle? That's an exaggeration. Everything depends on what you want to present. Particular pieces can be "practiced". If you want to present certain material with a very strict composition, or an arrangement of a famous piece you have to work out the so-called "product". It depends on the approach. If you assume that the entirety of music which you are going to play comes into being during the concert, then there is nothing that can be practiced. In this case, a complete and total arrangement is –

just the instruments that make up the ensemble, the order of including new elements (the occurrence of the instruments during the concert). That's what improvised-music is all about. It's about expressing the current moment. Naturally, there exist some universal truths: that's why I compose my own pieces – which I may perform often or rarely – so that I can document some of my thoughts in the form of a complete utterance. An open form expresses here and now, depending on the moment in life. That's the greatest value of the act of an open improvisation. As I said, – people aren't able to listen even when they have a unique chance to participate in a creative process. Maybe they just don't want to? After all, many people don't know what they want. It's a sign of our times, we may all feel confused.

Right. What about the audience? Is it difficult to have an adequate listener - or is it not rare at all? For example, Mózg² in Bydgoszcz has of course its frequent visitors but there are also different kinds of patrons. Can you say that you remember one particular performance because of its great audience?

Fate has been very generous to me. I almost always have the pleasure of associating with a great audience. I believe that the music becomes approved when it is understandable. The audience's acceptance of the contents of a concert and its form of expression probably means harmonious relationship of both sides³. It's great that such diverse audiences want to listen to this type of music. I think it shows best the undisputed need for these types of cultural events. The problem lies in the management companies. Sometimes I have the impression that people responsible in that matter don't have any idea as to what to offer to the audience. We can observe a significant interest in this kind of music. If we consider the fact that it's a very demanding art to percept then it only proves [the existence of] a conscious and searching audience. Actually, I don't remember ever being dissatisfied with my concert's reception. I always meet with an understanding. While presenting one's point of view, one always has to take into consideration that there can be individuals that just happened to be in a wrong place at a wrong time. Mózg is a great club. It's run by a friend of mine. For 15 years he's been working hard to realize his project. Different kinds of people are everywhere, no matter the place. Generally, I have an impression that society as such likes ambitious music, that people need it.

What is the difference between your own opinion about your performance and the audience's reaction or evaluation? Are you equally strict with yourself and with the listener? There are also comments and remarks from the fellow musicians...

² A club in Bydgoszcz, Poland.

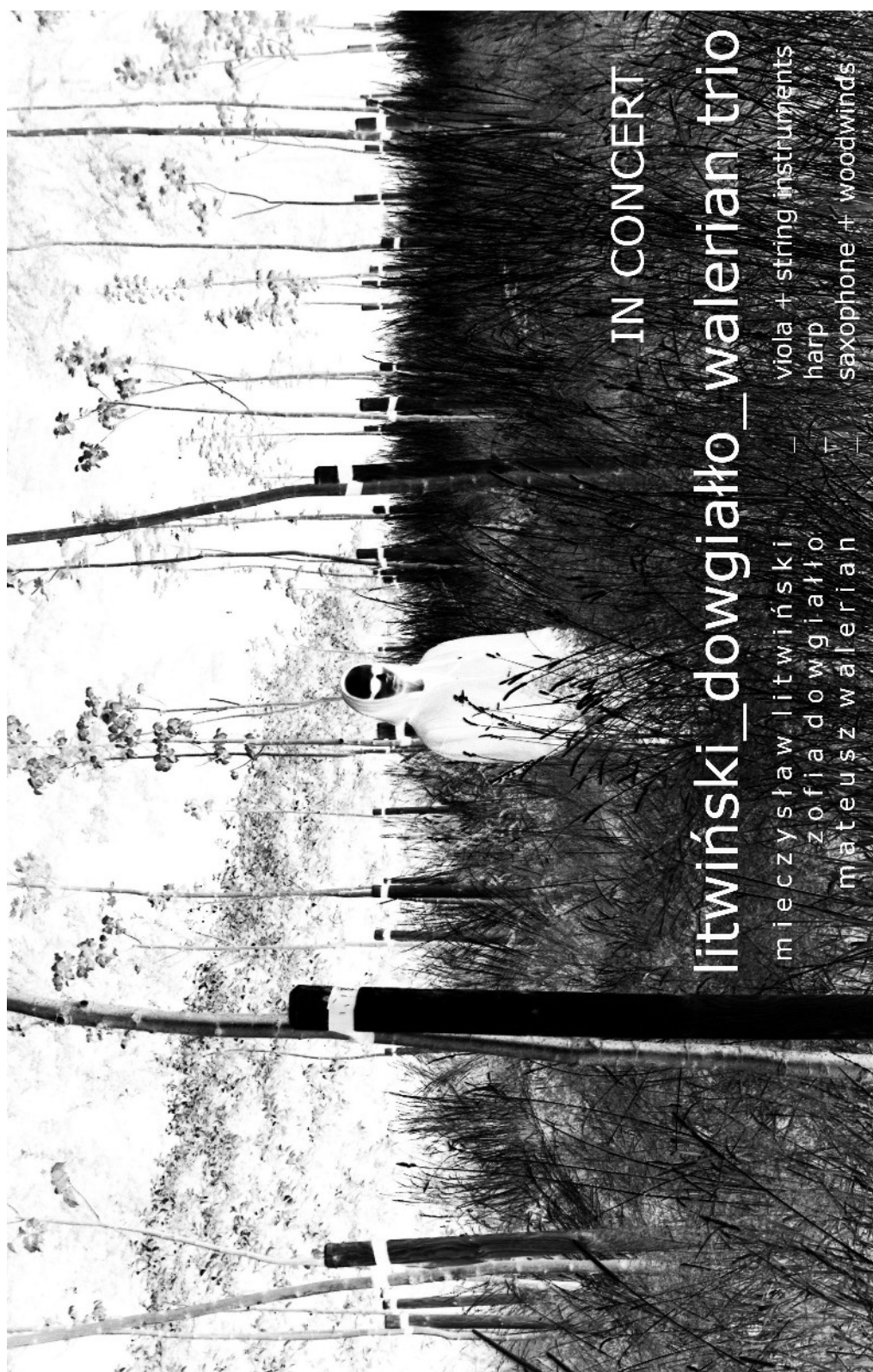
³ Audience and musicians.

I don't like 90% of my music. The audience, in the end, is always satisfied, and appreciates this or that quality, to a lesser or bigger extent. Notice that when a drummer plays a lot, in a hard and brutal way, either during the concert or a solo, then the audience gets crazy even if it's just an emanation of energy without any special meaning. In most cases. If he plays a spare, exquisite, intellectual solo, for example using barely audible sounds, then it will never be appreciated as much as in the first case. It happens this way, because the expectations in the case of a concert often create an image of a popular show. So the musicians' remarks – not necessarily made by my colleagues – are the only ones I truly consider. If I have the honor of performing with certain people, it probably means that my music is in high regard in the environment. A true musician's remark is ruthless, honest and reliable. It's a so-called "expert opinion". There are also groups of music lovers, or audiophiles. These groups, due to their engagement, both intellectual and emotional, in the issue of sound are the best determinants of the reviewed quality. However, they often can't evaluate the event objectively, mostly because of their individual tastes.

Let's stay for a while longer on the issue of the musicians who accompany you. It can be said that performing together an improvised-music makes the responsibility for what emerges collective. Do you feel responsible for others on the stage in such moments? Let's take your cooperation with the Oleś brothers as an example.

The responsibility in every field and in every venture that involves team work is always collective. That's obvious. It's a collective responsibility, by definition. In the case of improvised-music every link is, naturally, equally important. This dependence occurs also in the case of music that has a lower level of openness due to the strictly ascribed roles. It boils down to something different, but the unity of group is fundamental here as well. Musicians are a quite peculiar social group but, similarly to the other elements of society, they are also subject to certain universal criteria. Generally, the music itself is a completely abstract medium. It's a language that may turn out to be very difficult to master even in the simplest form, consisting of only "reading". While studying painting or drawing we can master the use of paintbrush and after some time we will paint more difficult forms, starting from, for example, still art, through architecture, study of a model, portraits etc. In time, we enrich our color palette, develop characteristic features in order to create our own style, concentrate on the subject matter interesting to us. The creation act in the case of improvised-music can be compared with the creation of a painting. Sound is immaterial. The paint put on canvas remains there, the sound disperses in the air. - Eric Dolphy said: When you *hear music, after it's over*, it's gone in the air. You can never capture it *again!*⁴

⁴ Source: <http://athensjazztet.com/jazz-quotations/>, 23.03.2011.



IN CONCERT

litiwiński_dowgiakło_walerian trio

mieczysław litiwiński
zofia dowgiakło
mateusz walerian

viola + string instruments
harp
saxophone + woodwinds



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DATE TIME PLACE

In the case of improvised-music the creative act is collective because, i.e. dependence. While drawing, on the other hand, we can simply improve the drawing through visual correction. The unrecorded music disappears but there is no possibility of reversing the already played sounds. The improvising musicians or, more precisely, the improvisers, work on utilizing a very complicated language that obviously requires not only technical but, first of all, compositional virtuosity. Creating a decent level of improvisation takes years of work. A true – meaning complete –statute of an improviser consists of a lot of essential aspects, such as the life experiences that create our mental horizon, philosophy or outlook, as well as sound perception developed gradually through reasonable cognition. All these aspects allow us to create individual musical culture in which we are able to “move”. In fact, the process of creating a musical composition is something like a resultant of the creative acts in the case of painting and literature . The respect towards the recipient suggests that we should speak eloquently but, most of all, about interesting subjects. I think this shows well the mutual dependence, the responsibility of the musicians on stage. You mentioned the Oleś brothers as an example, well, what can I say... Perhaps only that I was extremely lucky to meet on my way, at some point, at the age of 24, such advanced masters, and in a rhythm section at that. This allows me top quality masterly study not only of the issue of a group playing, but also the experience of incredible virtuosity of rhythm and harmony, which in the end guarantees a complete and accurate study of the phenomenon of music. This is something difficult to overestimate. I've always respected my work in an absolutely ruthless and almost totally fanatical way. I think this is the reward.

Let me interrupt you: you said that sound is incorporeal. And what about the way in which music can stimulate our body and our psycho-physical reactions? Of course we are not talking about the high intensity of sound or other extremes, but the quasi-abstract nature of the music you hear played, which has such enormous power over us, also physical in effect.

That is the magical power of this mode of expression. Music, from the technical side is pure mathematics. It is an extremely powerful medium which has always shaped reality to a great extent. In my opinion, it is for the brave (and the conscious); and courage should not be confused with stupidity. I do not feel up to present this issue from a scientific point of view. My friend, a world-class theoretical physicist, with whom I have had the great honor to lead rather extreme philosophical discourse for a number of years, usually defines this phenomenon as "surfing the matrix" (laugh). You can talk with him about quarks, quantum gravity, string theory, etc.

Is improvisation stress-free? Would you say that it is associated with a particular psychological or psycho-physical state, different from simply “replaying” music?

I suppose stress must be an accidental matter in the case of certain situations, within the margin of error. Another thing is that this margin can be very wide in the music world. A conscious action, consisting in an honest and skilful approach to the phenomenon cannot be stressful. A reasonable man will not take action towards the realization of projects with which he is not able to cope. “Remaking” or “replaying” music, as you called it, consists in performing a planned material. It can be a stressful thing if we are not sure of our technique. Improvisation can be stressful if we are not sure of our beliefs and technique. Open improvisation demands almost insane concentration. The final effect is naturally determined by many factors, and although a professional can tune out even under the most unfavorable circumstances, staying alone with the music, there are always some interferences. Naturally physical condition is extremely important here because playing an instrument can surely be compared to professional sport. As everybody knows, bad physical condition usually influences mental health a decrease in intellectual capacity, which is tantamount to a real decline in creativity, which is the basis of the act discussed here. In the case of performing musical improvisation, during the creative act, surely we can talk about a specific psychophysical condition. Really improvisation consists in an attentive listening to each other. Starting from the point of total concentration manifesting in the unity between the musicians at an almost “telepathic” level, a sound image is built up, followed by another one, which then transforms into an animation and creates a coherent story. Should that unity be obtained, the musicians enter into a common plane, a kind of a “mental path”, and, sharing it, they build together, step by step, a metaphysical whole by giving it form to fill it with some content at the final stage. It is an intricate and logical weaving of sound webs, often under very diverse conditions. Looking at the issue in this way, we can see the important role played by the comfort consisting in the possibility of a precise representation of presented music.

I admit that you surprised me with such a metaphorically-evocative description of improvisation. Most musicians usually say something along the lines of: *Dude, this is simply mystical!...*

Mystical aspect side, we should, nevertheless, know what we are dealing with. Many improvising musicians “adjust the theory to the facts”. There are legions of avant-garde musicians lacking elementary ability to use their equipment. Many believe that improvisation consists in a total and even abrupt self-expression. What if the audience does not want pure emotions? If the content is also expected, and not just the energy? I do not mean here only showiness. Naturally such exhibitionism is needed,

but we should not be confined to it because the music itself loses out on it. In fact, most of free jazz or free improv projects present only two types of compositions: forte and piano. Because of such an approach the avant-garde music has a problem with getting rid of a label classifying it – in my opinion – strictly pejoratively. I hate it when I see the musicians assume that if something is difficult or confusing, it is automatically good. This is a very widespread phenomenon. A narrow perspective.

Can the term “collapse into a trance” be useful in talking about improvisation or will it rather create chaos? Of course I thought about shamans and dancing dervishes, but it can be associated more widely.

This is one of the aspects; however, the trance music itself has a different specification. It probably has its origins in the Australian didgeridoo and African drums. By the way, the didgeridoo is the oldest instrument on Earth, it was not created by man. It is a ground part of the eucalyptus root hollowed out by termites. An instrument created by Mother Nature. The trance music is characterized by frequent repetitions. It is a story more rhythmic rather than melodic. Naturally you can, in certain aspects, compare group improvisation to a trance, but labeling it with this name would be very restrictive. A trance is usually monotonous, keeping us at a certain level, an improvisation is much more dynamic, it goes much further, it is very inflexional and diverse.

Could you refer, in possibly the simplest, unembellished and not too lofty way, music art you practise to zen, which is close to your heart?

Music is meditation. The term “Zen” comes from the Chinese term *Chan*, which in turn was derived from the Sanskrit term *Dhyana* which means simply a meditation, or a “meditative state”. Music is Zen.

I keep being reminded here of such a quote from a Machado’s poem: *Wanderer, the road is your footsteps, nothing else*⁵. It is simple but not simplistic. I think it goes with your approach to both avant-garde and improvisation.

I do not know what to say ... thank you.

Do you also glance at yourselves during the group improvisation? Do you communicate with each other by looks or gestures – or is the sound sufficient?

Of course. Naturally an attentive listening to the context is the basis. Eye contact is a necessary complementation. It is said that eyes are the mirror of the soul. During the performances (I almost always play in small groups, trios or duos) we always position ourselves on the scene in an appropriate manner so as to be able to main-

⁵ Transl.: Francisco Varela (source: Noë, A. 2009. *Out of Our Heads. Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness*. New York: Hill and Wang: 97).

tain eye contact. There is no place for a leader in groups playing this kind of music. Each musician is absolutely to an equal degree an essential part of the whole. Otherwise this type of music has no right to appear.

Could you say that some instruments are better for improvisation?

My friend Slawek Janicki, a contrabassist, a founder and a curator of the music club “Mózg”, once chanced the following statement while talking with me: “A good musician is able to give an interesting concert for 15 min on any instrument (regardless which he originally plays)”.

Comparing the musician’s virtuosity to the mastery of driving a car or to practicing sport, a surplus, which the improvisation seems to give, is not perhaps entirely explained by the concept of “mastery” or “proficiency”.

A trumpet virtuoso of an extraordinary importance, Andrzej Przybielski, has left us recently. He was without doubt one of the greatest musicians in the history of European jazz scene. He was known for his unique bearing which was probably conducive to him being undeservedly overlooked as one of the best trumpeters in the world. Andrzej used to say: “You do not take a travelling salesman on space flights”.

I remember that in the literature devoted to jazz musicians there was something which always intrigued me... a “cat” as a term for a kind or a class of musicians. Recently you described it in an excellent way, using examples of a few persons.

The cat is, however you look at it, the perfect animal. Not only because it is the king of animals, both in the steppe and savannah, in the jungle or even in the less favorable Siberia – it is the lord and a master everywhere, unless there are people with some heavy machinery. As we know – they will not appear without any machinery. The cat is springy, nimble, dignified, ruthless, intelligent, mystical, independent. It always lands on its four paws. It is difficult for me to enumerate here all the qualities of this magical animal. These aforementioned features relate to the way of playing and the whole phenomenon which the musician represents by his or her art. It is possibly the most superlative attribute to characterize a musician with. You ask about an example of the Siberian tiger – John Coltrane. You would have to talk about this with a tomcat; at the moment, I am doing everything to be able to aspire to the rank of a kitty at some point.

How would you describe the sound of your playing the saxophone?

It is difficult to talk about my personal sound, as this is an aspect worked on for years and I am still very young. What do I aspire to? What kind of sound do I work on? What sound do I perfect? My own, honest and supposedly well-considered one – if

you believe the reviewers... I have no idea, you know how it is to talk about oneself. I respect the sound. I am fascinated by the openness of free improv, on the other side I am rather something of a classicist, I mean, I would like to reach my full potential possessing the range of a virtuoso, allowing me to transfer as much information as possible in a precise, open, ruthless and honest manner. The sound is like a color palette and paintbrush dynamics in painting. This is the aspect which matures slowly and requires hard, unceasing work. All of the greatest painters in history have used their own color palette and paintbrush dynamics, singular value or texture. There is a similar situation with the sound. To achieve something you have to work your whole life on this without any guarantees.

However, you were surprised by the review where your playing was described as sweet...

Yes, I remember that review (laughter). It went something like “sweet, warm, very melodic, tone and timbre explorations, fresh and inspiring, cool, thoughtful with very jazz phraseology, moving from blues, bebop, free-bop up to free improv”. The best review I have ever received. I was so happy that I wrote it down (laugh).

And does your playing to a certain degree reflect your personality?

I spend all my time developing my personality. Many people are surprised that I do not want to waste my time on parties, receptions or other things like that. Life is very short. Time must be respected. Let me quote a statement. A highly promising drummer – my friend Bartłomiej Kold with whom I was studying philosophy for a while, showed it to me first. One winter evening after a whole day-long of study of natural philosophy we were sitting in his apartment, listening, as usual, to music of a supreme sort. On one of the albums an excellent producer from New York put between the tracks a skit with a fragment of a statement made by Bruce Lee. I am absolutely not a fan of this man, but his definition of style is brilliant and certainly the best I have ever heard. Although it refers to the martial arts system it can be paraphrased in any way:

*I do not believe in styles anymore. I mean I do not believe that there is such thing as, like, a Chinese way of fighting or a Japanese way of fighting – or whatever way of fighting, because unless a human being has three arms and four legs, there can be no different form of fighting. But, basically, we only have two hands and two feet. Styles tend to not only separate men – because they have their own doctrines and then the doctrine became the gospel truth that you cannot change. But if you do not have a style, if you just say: Well, here I am as a human being, how can I express myself totally and completely? Now, that way you won't create a style, because style is a crystallization. That way, it's a process of continuing growth.*⁶

⁶ Source: The Pierre Burton Show: Interview with Bruce Lee. <http://usuarios.multimania.es/bruce/entrev.htm>. 23.03.2011.

Actually my question about the relationship of art and your personality was quite banal – but the answer – was not. A little teasingly, allow me to make this question more corporeal. The life of a musician for whom condition is important is probably limited in some way. It is connected with a discipline. Could you say something about it? Rock fans are generally impressed by the lives in the *enfant terrible* style as Morrison's or Hendrix's. Legendary jazz musicians were not worse in this regard, either. Some people are jealous of their panache. I am trying to provoke you to complain a little bit...?

The truth is that the percentage of people addicted to various kinds of substances and the percentage of lunatics, showmen, degenerates or complete idiots is identical not only in every music genre, but in every profession of everyday life, among carpenters, athletes, professors, doctors, lawyers, welders, designers, computer scientists, managers, scientists, musicians, etc., etc. Do you know the saying: „there's no business like show business”? (laughter) Some environments simply better expose this range of social behavior because of pure marketing reasons - they generate enormous profits in this way. For some people generating confusion or even scandals is the only way to ensure their existence. Consider the whole bunch of idiotic celebrities who are famous for being famous. True art is not supposed to be boastful, but we still need to sell it, if we are guided by profit. Obviously, there are different ways to achieve that. There is no sense to elaborate this longer here, if some is reading this journal, he or she is probably is aware of the functioning of social mechanisms. Making a fool of oneself is impressive for some people and it is associated with freedom. The tastes are different as are needs. This is useful for some people, but destructive for others. The issue lies in the appropriate matching of a training program with the specifications of an individual.

We all live in the specific and multilayered environments. This can be a quite leading question – but indicate, please, which aspects of the surroundings reflect more distinctly in your art: city, relationships, travelling, great events... Or maybe none of these things particularly.

The city? I do not think so. I live in a small town by choice now. I've lived in a big city, it had no influence on my work. Maybe I will move to New York, this is probably the only reasonable change in my case. However New York is not a city, it is New York. The environment makes it unique, especially the Brooklyn scene. Maybe New York is too broad at this time. Nowadays Brooklyn matters the most, musically. A single district, but it gathers an incredibly large number of musical geniuses, I would even say extraterrestrials. Relationships? I absolutely do not allow myself for inference of these kinds of factors. Travelling? Great events? Travelling educates. For sure. It extends your worldview, whereas great events sometimes brutally shape it. What is the

function of art, its application? What should art be? True? What does it mean: true? Does it mean it should be honest? (laughter) You know how it sounds... I was once talking about it with my friend, a sculptor, Bartosz Ulatowski. He works with classical Japanese weapon settings and Japanese gold smithery in which he has reached a level of mastery and virtuosity, and remains one of the few people in the world outside Japan who have fathomed the secrets of this art. We often discuss more or less reasonable topics, such as art, you know... A musician to a sculptor. Once we concluded that the art itself is the least necessary element in society, but instead, the most important. Should you like to compare the artist with a life-saving surgeon, a doctor, or a scientist whose work generates a better understanding of reality and improves the quality of life, the artist comes out lacking. But if you think what has remained after us or what will remain...? Look at Egypt, Mesopotamia, at the ancient culture in general. Only the art has remained, this is what distinguishes us from the rest of animals. What should it be like? What should it serve? It should be current and give the spirit of the time of its creation. Of course you can allude to it, but a replication is, in my opinion, completely unreasonable, it reduces art to the rank of a handicraft. When we create something, we always reflect in some way the reality that surrounds us, no matter how understood. If we are talking about something we did not see or experience, then how can we be real and authentic artists? Art is also honest when it speaks to its generation and corresponds to the context in which it is created. There are absolute truths in the universe invariable since the dawn of time and they are illustrated by different means of expression; however, you cannot ignore the current historical context.

Finally, I must ask you about this: to what extent can your study of philosophy resonate musically, in your opinion? Influential musicians have been all sorts of people, sometimes with no education. Do you think you would be a different musician with no academic contact with philosophy?

Come on, Witold... What does it mean, with no education? Without the official certificate of graduating from a public institution in a given field? Let us ask ourselves, how many generations of professors the people you are talking about have educated through their works of art? This is the last aspect which could influence my music. Naturally, Eastern thought has influenced me a lot in every aspect of my life. At the university nobody mentioned Eastern philosophy. This is puzzling.



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IN CONCERT

mateusz walerian trio

mateusz walerian	—	saxophone + woodwinds
marcin oleś	—	double bass
bartłomiej brat oleś	—	drums + percussion



PLACE

TIME

DATE

Krzysztof Knittel has provided us with some of his drawings as a supplement to this interview. You are also presenting yourself photo- and graphically here. Are there among your well-known musicians any frequent situations of reaching for forms of expression other than playing or composing?

You know... Probably it is much like this: if you are able to do something by yourself, you do not have to rely on the cooperation of a graphic designer, you reach your intended result at once in the design phase. In New York you can hear this phrase, often used as a commentary: „Man, this is 21st century I guess: do it yourself”. If you are able to create a satisfying graphic design yourself, why would you ask someone else to do it? In fact, I design the graphics of posters, leaflets and even tickets for my concerts, I designed my entire website and a whole bunch of other things. Designing is very enjoyable. A quality of a completely different sort than music creation. It can be strictly individual. I engaged actively in fine arts for 16 years, since the age of 5, though in analog form. I've been increasingly better at mastering a graphic software program, so the designs are marked by a better and better quality, as well.

Finally, allow me to do a short – maybe pretentious – thought experiment: some terrible circumstances cause all instruments to disappear, that is the saxophone, clarinets... Who would you feel then?

A man.

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