

Incendiary talk to Spoelstra

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*This month we speak to the great Spoelstra, (known to us and now you as Jeroen), Leiden-based visionary, purveyor of strange found sounds and creator of a seminal EP *I've Got Issues the Shape of Italy* and LP *The Almighty Internet*: neither of which are for the faint-hearted. We finally plucked up some courage to ask great man some questions. Now, read on.*

IN: Your music is so different experienced live than on record. On the LP & 10" it is very considered and refined; but live you put on quite a show. Any reasons for this difference?

S: On this matter, reasons and causes are probably interchangeable to some extent. Basically this all starts with a notion that for me, making records and doing live shows are very different experiences, at least so far. I had only played one live show as Spoelstra before I recorded the songs for the *I Got Issues The Shape Of Italy 10"*, and at that time I wasn't really aware of or busy with how this would translate into an onstage or (preferably), "no stage" environment. A lot of my equipment was either integrated into my set up or bought weeks after this recording and with that, just about everything concerning methods and songs had already changed drastically into a more electronic sort of thing before the first gig after that, so that would explain why at least the 10" and my live shows are very different.

I recorded *The Almighty Internet* during the following year and I would think this does capture a lot more of what usually happens live. Still, doing this in the privacy of my own home is completely different from playing live. This also has something to do with the fact, that basically, and believe it or not, I have prepared songs with melodies that repeat or not, but still, there is a certain logic to what happens. If I'm going to record them, I feel some urge to have them sound as I meant them to sound and although there is also room for improvising and unexpected developments. If something is wrong, there is always the possibility to do another take and make it sound better.

This is certainly not something to be done to perfection, because that might just as well be the wrong direction, and probably in any way further away from my live sound, where there is no possibilities of doing another take and as there are always unexpected things happening (deliberately or not) and then improvisation becomes an integral part of what happens, to be used to elaborate or correct and a lot of times the most chaotic parts are originally meant as ways to mix one song into the other and sometimes end up being longer than the actual songs. I would think that live improvisation is a lot more fun if people can actually see me doing it, smiling or frowning, looking confused or convinced, whatever the moment brings. I realise in hindsight that what I seem to be trying to say is in fact, that for me improvisation doesn't have much meaning if there is no one there to see it when it happens and that's probably why my records contain less chaos than my live shows, but then again, that's not really what I meant and I predict future output

will show otherwise. There are no guarantees, because I like to release albums with a certain theme to it, or limitations if you will.

As I had been claiming to some people that I would one day make a country album, I recorded the 10" with mainly guitar and a drumkit. It is probably hardly country at all in the end, but still, the CD after that does not contain any guitar nor an actual drumkit. It's nice to not hear you say that both these records sound completely different from each other, as that might mean that some of my songwriting habits are recognizable regardless of the instruments they are played on, but then again, you probably did notice the difference and just asked me a different question...

IN: And what is that 10" made of? It's not vinyl...

S: The 10" is made from polycarbonate, a form of plastic actually. Only 50 copies exist and they were hand made in New Zealand.

IN: For someone who clearly has a very good practical musical knowledge and musical sense, you make quite, erm, retarded sounds... Why?

S: I guess this all boils down to a certain sense of logic and then, finding out where logic ends and insanity begins and crossing the line or not. Dissonance in music is nothing new in genres like classical music, avant garde, rock, jazz and what not and this is something I love very much, because it provides a lot of possibilities in making music with emotions that are not on a straight line from happy to sad or angry. The fact that I have some musical knowledge is probably the very reason why I like that so much, because I basically know what tones fit and don't fit to make music sound simply happy or sad and that pretty much bores me quickly (which is probably the other reason), so for me, that's all logic.

Now I'm not too sure if you are referring to the dissonance when you are mentioning retarded sounds, but I assume it has something to do with it. I think an average Spoelstra gig does suggest a reality where basically any tone can be right and it's up to the audience to decide for themselves if they would like to live in that reality (if only during the gig) or not. The fact that this is all very logical to me, does not mean that I can not also get bored by that logic and take it even further and cross the border... Actually, it's great, but I was a bit surprised why a lot of people are mentioning the retardation of melodies (in whatever words used) in Spoelstra's music, as I know of (and play in) countless other acts making discordant tunes with a lot more violence and noise than what happens in Spoelstra. I hope somebody will thoroughly explain it to me one day, but I think it might have to do with the fact that my songs are not basically aggressive, violent, sad or something like that, and probably have a much more cheerful and danceable ring to them and that's probably the last place where someone would expect weird notes and that just makes it very hard to ignore.

IN: What led you to create and perform using so many pedals on that table? What is it with the pedals? Tell us musical numbskulls the Lore of the Pedal.

S: My set-up wasn't there from one moment to the next. With no intention of starting a solo act, I got myself a loopstation to have fun with playing guitar, had fun with it, started connecting cables to the wrong inputs, got another pedal, did a live show, experimented some more, got a sampler, started to use it as a drumkit, had fun with it, bought a synthesizer and a mixer and from then on, there just seemed to be more and more possibilities and so on. The procedure is basically very simple: synth, guitar and sampler go to the mixer, then everything goes through some effect pedals, then to the loopstation, where I record parts that I play and have them loop until the end of time or till I stop or change them, then everything goes back to the mixer and sounds come out.

IN: You're on a very cool label, **Narrow Minded (sic)**. Tell us about them.

S: The typo is understandable and happens often, but the name is NARROMINDED. Narrominded is a label run by some of my friends. As all of them together have a very wide taste in music, this makes it a very diverse label and that shows if you see all that they are releasing, ranging from ambient and drone, loud obnoxious rock, electro and synthpop. Occasionally there are also label festivals, where all this is happening in the course of one evening and it's great that these things are happening. Despite all this diversity, it's also one big happy family and certainly I feel like a member of this family. Just as long as I'm home before dark, or else....

IN: Your views on the Dutch, and Leiden music "scene" would be very much appreciated Jeroen.

S: As probably everywhere else in the world, there are a couple of good things happening amidst of a lot of in my opinion dubious and unnessecary activities. I certainly wouldn't say there is one Dutch scene. The majority of whatever would form a Dutch scene, is probably about bands sounding as much as possible like more famous, foreign counterparts and a lot of people following them and thinking this is all there is in Holland, oblivious to the fact that there is so much more going on. That doesn't mean that they would like it, but I think you can only be sure about it, if you know it exists, and I know, most of this majority does not know much about that. The music that I like and the scene around it are probably not for everyone and I have never spent much energy in changing the bigger picture and just concentrate in finding out where the good stuff is happening and making the best of that.

The more the merrier, but you don't need much to do it, just a couple of enthusiastic people, some with instruments, someone with a PA and someone willing to sell tickets and beers. Leiden has exactly that and with that, there is certainly something like a good scene for loud and experimental stuff and that's great.

IN: This interview can't end without asking about your LP & single covers, which are - frankly - unreadable. Why are they unreadable? What part of your psyche dictated this to be the case?

S: Well, what can be seen can't be unseen. I of course know what I wrote, so for me it's impossible not to see it, but that doesn't help other people much. Anyway, I just wanted to make a nice looking cover and preferably one with nothing with text on it and that's exactly what I did, two times so far. The deal is, that anyone buying a 10" or CD will get his or her money back, if they succeed in reading everything on the cover, so of course, it's shouldn't be made too simple, or I would never get filthy rich. Needless to say, no one ever came back to me with a solution.

Anyway, it's meant as a challenge. It's quite easy to find the titles and instrumentation etc. on the internet here and there, so I guess people shouldn't have to be unknowing about the basic information, and with that, I bit of practice in deciphering the letters and how it works. If people are really interested in a story about a bird trying to pick up a phone and product information, they can give it a try if not, well, I still had fun making it..

IN: Favourite biscuit please

S: Roze koek.

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