

1. This group first performed at the 2015 Vancouver Jazz Festival – whose idea was it for the four of you to perform? Or more specifically, to put together two duos of long standing. François and Benoît, you first met and played together at the 1995 Vancouver festival and have been performing sporadically as a duo since 1996, and of course you have three beautiful duo records on Songlines, as well as performing in each other's larger projects. Gordon and Kenton, you've both been members of Canadian folk-rocker Dan Mangan's group Dan Mangan and Blacksmith between I think about 2010 and 2015 (?), but Kenton, you'd been performing in the Gord Grdina Trio well before that, right? And the two of you have an instrumental duo called Peregrine Falls that's been active for several years. And François and Kenton, you first performed together I think in Gord Grdina's Boxcutter (which goes back to what, 2005?), and then as members of Gordon Grdina's Haram since 2009 (?) – please correct these dates if you can. Anyway, there are many connections here, but Benoît, had you ever performed with Gord and Kenton before?

FH The idea of the four of us playing together came about during discussions with Ken Pickering around his line up for the 2015 Vancouver Jazzfestival. As Benoît and I were looking at opportunities for the duo, Ken suggested we merge this with the trio collective. Knowing how Benoît's playing fits into so many different configurations, from solo to large ensemble, this would work nicely. I suggested he brings his bass station to augment the lower end of the quartet and possibly to perform on Fender Rhodes at the festival. The recording from those live performances convinced me to apply for a recording grant to see this project come to life in a studio setting.

2. I remember those two 2015 gigs well – I believe there were pieces by François, Gord and Benoît and a lot of pretty high energy freeish-to-free playing along the way. This record is quite different – it's mostly free improv with only two compositions, and a lot of it is more ambient/deep listening than what I would have expected. I'm really curious about how it turned out that way. Did you talk about the music or how to structure it at all ahead of time or as the session progressed, or was it just the inspiration of the place

and time that somehow led to these often quite long, slowly evolving excursions (the longest being 31 minutes – and it was just too long to include on the record). And just to state what is probably obvious – there were no overdubs, right?

FH No overdubs, no. We just started playing and hit the record button right away. The whole session unfolded quite spontaneously, with hardly any discussions between takes. We did a few different takes of the composed material. Good suggested we play Soro, as he knew Benoît's affinity for African rhythms in his piano approach. Benoît brought out "Broken World", written shortly after the terrorist Bombing at the Bataclan in Paris. We tried it and found it to be a beautiful, haunting piece. The rest was completely improvised, and took us in the most unexpected musical spaces, with lots of generous room for all to participate in the music making.

3. The record opens and closes with two African-inspired pieces, "Soro" (composed by François) and "Waraba", a piece credited to the four of you and dedicated to our late friend, the wonderful bass (and also kora) player Jean-Jacques Avenel, who led a band of that name in the early to mid 2000s – its other members were great West African musicians living in Paris. (I believe the only recording of that band is the one on Songlines which you produced, Benoît). Did you have him in mind when you recorded those pieces, and could you say something about JJ if you knew him or more generally about the influence of African music on your music if there has been one? For me "Waraba" ends the record on a hopeful and almost joyous or at least somewhat peaceful note.

4. All of you except Kenton are using electronics on the record but, in keeping with the moods of the music, it's mostly pretty subtle. Could you comment on what electronics are being used, and how, in certain pieces, and how you think about integrating electronic and acoustic sounds? Benoît, what exactly is a bass station (the only keyboard you're playing here, and which allows you to play in the midrange as well)? I used the word "ambient" just now but this is not much like what people usually think of as

ambient jazz, though in some ways it's not so different from Poolplayers (an unfortunately short-lived co-led group made up of Benoît, Steve Argüelles, Arve Henriksen and Lars Juul that recorded for Songlines).

FH Since most of our live performances with the trio are high energy affairs, I've opted to play my clarinet through a guitar amp at some point, adding a bit of reverb and delay initially, eventually investigating other types of modulation pedals to more or less complement Gord's approach within the trio. I have also been working with loopers for the last two years, as I'm interested in opening up the vertical range of the clarinet, treating it as a chordal instrument rather than a monophonic one. I consider my work with loops a sort of extension of my playing with two clarinet simultaneously. In the context of this session it served me well to create textural elements which allowed me to move the clarinet away from its traditional melodic confines.

5. A word that seems to fit this music well is "liminal" (defined as "relating to a transitional or initial stage of a process; occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold"). It's music that's on the verge of becoming something else, or sometimes returning to a previous state, across boundaries that seem relatively undefined and intuitive. And this applies to so many aspects of it: styles, instrumental combinations, the way it shifts almost unnoticeably between what might be called soloing to what might be called group improvisation by way of what might be called duets or trios, harmony/atonality, rhythmic and energetic aspects (from near-stasis to turbulence), different emotional resonances (from "Broken World"'s sorrow-tinged, anguished feelings to ones much harder to put into words). And much of it is music that you can listen to closely and consciously to or just let wash over you, trance-like (maybe that's what's most ambient about it). Anyone care to comment?

FH It speaks to the really broad scope of experiences by this collective. We can move from one musical state to the next with seemingly little effort, while trusting that the others will not only anticipate the next move, but also pave the way for this to happen at any given moment.

6. François, apart from producing the record you also edited and mixed it, and it was quite a long process. What did you learn about the music by immersing yourself in it that deeply that I haven't noticed or mentioned? And everyone, how do you feel this music complements (or departs from) the other music you're making?

FH It took quite a while in the mixing process to strike a balance between mood and dynamic range. As the music offers a lot of space and room for everyone to contribute to the fray, the playing never falls into clichés or basic traditional quartet constructs, where the melodic instrument plays the melody, the chordal instruments comp, or the drums lays down a groove. In this context, all the participants gets called to provide all of the above at any given moment. Even though there are “soloist” spaces within the pieces, they never linger or draw attention to themselves. They follow an unwritten logic that looks ahead to every opportunity to pass the baton or morph into something else.

7. So where do things go from here?

FH Besides looking for more opportunities to perform live, Gord, Kenton, and I have recorded a live trio session at The China Cloud which we plan on mixing and releasing in the wake of this quartet recording. We might reconnect with Benoît this summer while we're on tour with Gord's 10-piece band, Haram.