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Nick Roth brings us Tales From The Woodland

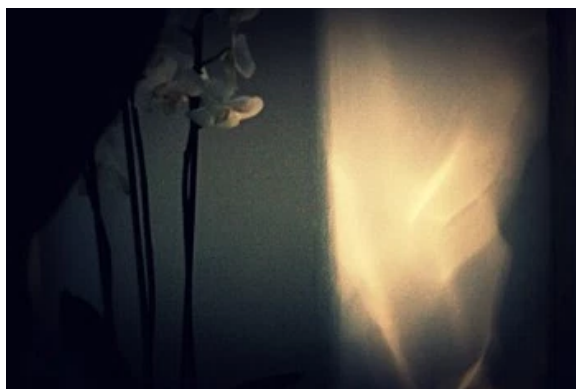
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Posted on: May 18, 2016 — Leave a Comment

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Spending time with Irish composer Nick Roth allows you to meet a man who wears his musical, political, and environmental beliefs on his sleeve. Deeply influenced by his own program which has given youths time to discover the forests and fields near his home – a home his family were forced to sell in 2013 – he has since sought to expand musically beyond his love affair with nature. A talented saxophonist, Roth endeavours to go far beyond the music itself. Whether “a text, an image, a scientific concept, a person,” it is through his music that he seeks to engage with everything around him – from a political movement to the flocking of birds to a tree in a forest.



Taking initial musical inspiration from his mother Joy, Roth has always been immersed in music. While those first steps might have been taken to his mother's jazz big band (and to what he as a toddler heard as "the loudest sound in the world"), the composer and saxophonist has worked tirelessly to bring a disparate melange of instruments, musical genres, and influences to his work. Roth explains his attraction to the saxophone as a young child, reminiscing in the echo of his running steps across the Baptist Church that his mother's band used to rehearse in toward "the shiny one in the front" that caught his eye. Now the musician is a regular winner at the Guinness Cork Jazz Festival, has had the chance to work as a composer and an artist in residence in both Europe and the Americas in recent years, and has performed extensively across three continents.

While a fan of all instruments – and indeed sounds far beyond traditional musicology – he feels his experiences playing in saxophone ensembles have offered unique opportunities for the composer. In his own compositions for saxophone, string and recorder, he has recognized the wide pitch and unified sonic profile that these groups offer. Referring to his first musical love, "you can really hear and understand in a very instinctual way where all of the other saxophonists are at all times.... this can give a real unity to the overall music."



Moving into more experimental locales, Roth has reconnected with his earlier experiences at his childhood home of Woodland Heights in Chorleywood. The artist has had an amazing opportunity to combine his musical influences with his outside interests, which has been translated to his musical

oeuvre. A massive influence has been Japanese composer Mamoru Fujieda, whom Roth has spent much of the past two years exploring and applying to his understanding of forest canopy ecology, botany, and ecology as a whole. This fascination, he believes, comes from what he terms as “a simple desire to express in music the beauty that we can see around us.”

Ingrained in this desire are projects such as the *Little Woodland Heights* and *Seed I* and *Seed II* pieces which flowered from Roth’s experiences as an educator. With the goal of introducing the link between natural beauty, dreams and music to children, the project has brought youngsters into closer contact with forests and encouraged them to try and write music based upon their experiences. Having been brought up close to a forest himself, Roth hoped to give children the opportunity to experience “at least a small taste of the childhood experiences that I was lucky enough to have growing up.” It also – given Roth’s family had recently had to sell the home he grew up in to a builder – gave the composer the chance to (in some way) come to terms with the loss the family had experienced. “In the end, it was not really losing the house that was so hard. It was more losing access to the forest and knowing that we were not able to protect it anymore.” The project seeks to increase children’s awareness of ecology and the importance of forests for all. The planet, he assures us, has “myriad forms of expression,” and bringing people closer to nature is one way in which natural beauty can be both preserved and represented in different artistic forms.



This belief regarding new musical boundaries has been carried into his record label Diatribe, which aims to showcase music “breaking new ground within its genre whilst [also expressing] as wide a diversity of styles as possible.” Perhaps a prime example of this is in his ensemble, Yurodny’s latest work *Haivka*, blending at times an almost breakneck pacing with traditional Ukrainian vocals and slower, more sombre, and searching pieces. Recorded over a period of great political upheaval in the former Soviet republic, the additional guest musicians from the Ukraine add a definite undercurrent of pathos to the overall album, while still seeking to show how even through its recording, it can present music as a unifying, nourishing experience. Roth sees music as inhabiting a “world without borders” and, using the analogy of a storm or a river rushing onwards, believes that music can overcome all political and economic divisions that cleave

people apart. In a world riven with conflict (and the Ukraine is nothing if not an example of that), the album dedicates itself “to all those who pray for rain.”

So much traveling and performing means that finding the time to immerse himself completely in the writing process can be a challenge for Roth. But with so many ideas – great and small – to bring to fruition, he shows little sign of stopping. Plans to compose a large-scale work based on French philosopher Michel Serres’s book *Genesis* will involve a change in voice and ensemble musicians and painters. On a smaller scale, a solo cello piece based on orchids and completed in collaboration with a photographer and olfactory artist is also in the works. Generating ideas are not a problem for the composer; time is his primary obstacle, quelling an ambition that seeks to push the experimental boundaries of music in conjunction with all of our other senses. Roth sees all manner of sound as ripe for creating unique music, and delights in working with “surprising combinations to contrast or highlight certain aspects in one another.” No doubt life on the road, in the studio or in the great outdoors all hold plenty of opportunities for Roth who plans to remain in touch with his childhood home in Chorleywood in the future.



More info:

Nick Roth was in Seoul to perform the World Premier of Seed II at the Maison Pernod Ricard in conjunction with the Embassy of Ireland.

Yurodny’s latest album Haivka was released in April and is available through ...

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