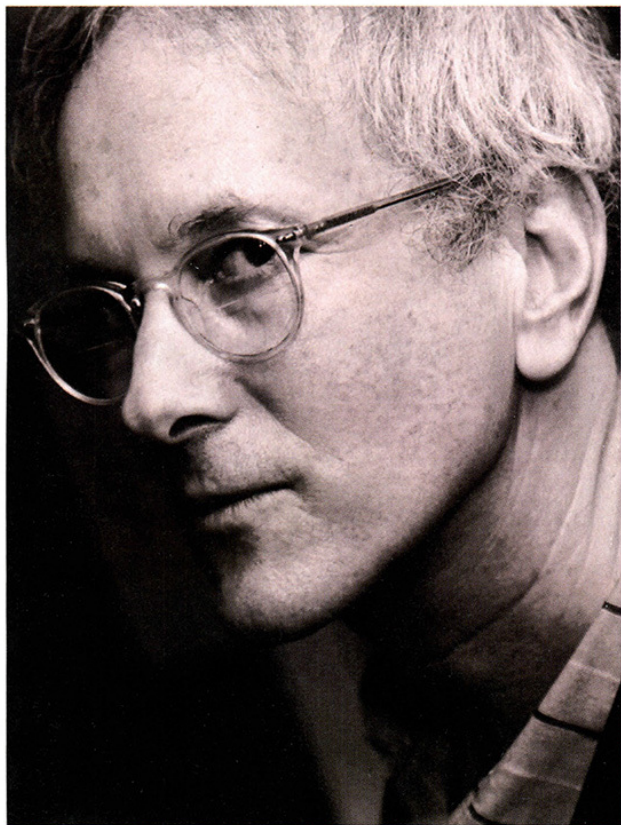


By David R. Adler



DOUG WIESELMAN

A PROTEAN SIDEMAN GOES (LITERALLY) SOLO

Multireedist and guitarist Doug Wieselman hasn't lacked for company in the past 30 years. He's played with the Lounge Lizards, Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, Tricky, Butch Morris, Cibo Matto, Karen Mantler, Martha Wainwright, Antony and the Johnsons, CocoRosie and more. His associations with pianists Wayne Horvitz and Anthony Coleman, trumpeter Steven Bernstein and others date back to the pre-Knitting Factory years of the New York Downtown scene. He's done theater and soundtrack work, including 80 episodes of the children's animated series *The Backyardigans*.

On *From Water* (88), however, Wieselman is heard all alone. Playing vintage Albert system clarinets, he offers a live-looping, subtly amplified solo recital with an intimate aesthetic, mysterious yet melodically direct. Released on vinyl and digital only, the record takes inspiration from sounds Wieselman heard while visiting various bodies of water. "I first heard [the sounds] when I was in these hot springs in Salmon, Idaho," he says. "I thought I was hearing an African choir. The closest approximate thing that I'd heard was those early King Sunny Adé records where there's a bunch of voices singing, the first *jùjú* music. As I tuned into it, I started hearing it on the beaches, from streams, in the wind. You really have to get rid of everything else that's going on. It's like a meditation." One piece on *From Water*, "Tennessee Valley (Choir)," features an actual choir—11 voices, including the duo from Cibo Matto—in an attempt to capture the water sound at its truest.

"I've been with Doug on a lot of those beaches where he's heard that music," says Bernstein, who swears by Wieselman in the reed section of his Millennial Territory Orchestra. "I've sat with Doug at many a river and ocean while he's sitting there hypnotized, trying to figure out the song. He's been doing this a long time."

Wieselman performed the *From Water* material twice in early 2014—first at Manhattan's amply sized Le Poisson Rouge, then in Brooklyn at the tiny Barbès. The latter gig was a twofer: He also played baritone sax and clarinet in guitarist Smokey Hormel's Secret Family, reveling in '50s-era Congolese music and Brazilian *forró* for a house that was beyond packed. The gulf between the two sets was wide, yet Wieselman was the link. Safe to say he's had many a night like that.

Wieselman was born in Los Angeles in 1954. "I was playing clarinet at 9, started playing guitar when I was 10 and started on saxophone at 13," he recalls. While an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Cruz, he studied and played with post-Cagean composers Gordon Mumma and James Tenney, among others. He also met kindred spirits like Horvitz and his future wife, singer-songwriter/pianist Robin Holcomb, whom he joined on myriad early efforts, first on the West Coast and then in New York.

Wieselman's New York sojourns began in 1981, but according to Horvitz, "Doug was in and out of New York much more than the rest of us. He lived in San Francisco for a while—he'd have a place in New York for four or five months but then he'd be gone."

Wieselman sums up the period: "I was absorbing it all, trying to be here. I was drawn to it but I couldn't commit to it. Finally in 1993 I spent the whole fall and a lot of winter here and decided this was where I need to be."

We're sitting in a café called Doma Na Rohu on Morton Street and Seventh Avenue, and Wieselman can literally point across the street to his earliest New York stomping ground: a basement space under the long-gone Exotic Aquatics pet store at 1 Morton St. that came to be called Studio Henry. Horvitz had rented it with quintet-mates and "it went from nothing to being a scene," the pianist says. "John Zorn and Elliott Sharp were there; I met Bobby Previte there. Before you knew it the Golden Palominos were rehearsing there; all the early Zorn game pieces were rehearsed there. And we started having concerts that were completely off the grid. It was never intended to be a business of any sort."

Bernstein recalls ongoing projects and "8 million little gigs" with Wieselman around this time, not to mention practice sessions

Recommended Listening:

Kamikaze Ground Crew *Madam Marie's Temple of Knowledge* (New World, 1994)

Doug Wieselman/Jane Scarpantoni/Kenny Wollesen *Trio S* (Zitherine, 2003)

Doug Wieselman *From Water* (88, 2014)

photograph by LUCIE JANSCH

where the two played Baroque duets on trumpet and soprano sax, searching for secrets in the overtone series. They deepened their connection in the Kamikaze Ground Crew, a septet with multi-instrumentalist Gina Leishman and others that began as a backing band for the Flying Karamazov Brothers, the virtuoso juggling troupe. On an impressive handful of releases from the early '90s on, the group mined a rich and eclectic sound with brass, reeds, drums, accordion and no bass. "It's not so active these days," Wieselmann says, "but it was a place where I could do some large-scale composing."

In 1992 Wieselmann debuted with Anthony Coleman on *Disco by Night*. Coleman also enlisted him in 1996 for *Selfhaters*, a unit that played what Wieselmann calls "broken music," inspired by the likes of Anton Webern, Morton Feldman and Samuel Beckett. After two CDs, the core *Selfhaters* trio returned to play a role on Coleman's *Pushy Blueness* and *Lapidation*, with Wieselmann bringing a wealth of texture and bite on E-flat clarinet and other instruments. "He'll play one note on the clarinet or guitar," Coleman says, "and it's really diaphanous, evanescent, it's the exact perfect thing. He's done that for so many people, and he's done it for me a million times."

There are moments on *Trio S*, Wieselmann's 2003 outing with cellist Jane Scarpantoni and drummer Kenny Wollesen, that point clearly toward the plaintive live-looping sound of *From Water*. In fact, the initial clarinet line from "Davy Lowston" on *Trio S* reappears as "Pacific 1" on *From Water*. There's a similarly enveloping, overlapping quality in a 1996 piece called "The Montana Section," which Wieselmann recorded alongside his old college friends Horvitz and Holcomb in the New York Composers Orchestra.

For Wieselmann there's no boundary between these projects and the extensive work he's done at the outer edges of pop. Lou Reed was a major highlight, of course: "My first session with Lou was through Steven Bernstein, who brought me in for the horn section. Hal Willner asked Steven to arrange for *Ecstasy* [from 2000]. We did the song 'Mad' and they decided it needs a solo at the end. We tried a few things but then I went in with my baritone and nailed it, and Lou got really excited. He was very encouraging." Wieselmann also has a tenor sax solo on "Overture" from Reed's 2003 album, *The Raven*; he opened for Reed on a tour with Victoria Williams as well. "We did his *Berlin* project, a five-night stint at St. Ann's Warehouse [in 2006], and in one song he just pointed at me to blow. It

was really beautiful."

Wieselmann has to restrain emotion when he speaks of Reed's recent death. He had the honor of playing guitar at the memorial, backing singer Jenni Muldaur in a rendition of the Velvet Underground's "Jesus." "I was blown away by how he sounded," Bernstein says. "He created this beautiful part for it."

Such are Wieselmann's instincts, whether he's doing the headiest improvised music or crafting an R&B horn chart for "Fistful of Love" from Antony and the Johnsons' *I Am a Bird Now*. As Antony Hegarty writes via e-mail, "If ever I need something to come alive, I call on him." **JT**

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