

TROUM & DRONE RECORDS INTERVIEW WITH HALLU / BROKEN DOLLS, NOVEMBER 2007

OK here is the interview, both questions about Troum and Drone Records :

Please note that we have to part this interview, as Troum are two persons and all answers are done by Glitsch & BarakaH together, but Drone Records related questions are answered by BarakaH alone (as its still almost a one-man-show)!!

TROUM SECTION

1) After 10 years with Maeror Tri and 8 years as Troum, how do you feel about music ? Do you have the same passion, the same envy to compose and experiment ?

No, sadly its different. When you're young and experiment with sounds its so exciting, you discover great stuff almost each time. And you think almost all noise you do is great, as its new to your ears.

Now the passion is still there, but it's so to say a more "defined" passion, we're much more self-critical and picky about our own stuff. But maybe its a logical and wanted development when you work with music on a bit more "professional" basis, you can not stand still.

Sound itself is still a "holy thing" - but thats's rather a question of consciousness & perception. You can find great sounds & moments in almost any acoustic phenomenon (in nature, man-made noises, music, etc.)

2) I think you were the first ones to create drone ambients with real instruments. How did you come up with that idea ? Was the idea to give a more organic feeling in ambient not using computers/electronics ?

Guess we were not the FIRST ones, but indeed in the "post-industrial" scene where we were somehow involved with, it was rarely seen. It wasn't a well thought-out idea, it was much more based on the conditions & circumstances we were set in. We didn't have much money to buy expensive electronic equipment, so we just experimented with a cheap radio-recorder and daily shit and scrap. And then you go from there, using "even instruments", or "even a sound-effect".

But there was (at first) no real concept behind it, it was more like: trying out some noise because you feel you have to do it. And we even DID use synths at the very beginning when we could afford them, but after a while it got just boring and we sold them... so, as often in history, things "just happen" and if you look later on it it seems to "make sense" within the whole development.

3) According to you, what is your best achievement so far (which album, or maybe a live show) ?

Of course: Always the next project; !

No, its rather hard to say, you grow older with your releases, when you put them out they are most important, then you develop and the works change again, too, also from the point you look back on them.

At the moment we would say that the brandnew album AIWS is our best work yet, last year it was the collaboration with MARTYN BATES " TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND", in both projects we put lots of work and it took years to finish them. From our earlier, more "dark" perspective it could be also RYNA or MNEMONIC INDUCTION, from the more "ecstatic" or rhythm-based perspective TJUKURRPA 3 or DARV ESH, from the emotional perspective surely TJUKURRPA 1 or SYMBIOSIS. In general: To make good music with very poor equipment (and poor technical skills we have) is something that enlightens us; Best live shows: Warszawa 1999, Limoges 2001, Dublin 2003, Moscow 2006, Brainwaves-Festival (Boston) 2006.

4) When you compose an album or a track, is improvisation a big part of it ? Do you let the music invade you, or do you have specific ideas and pattern ?

It can be always different, but usually we work on phrases or little fragments we record first. Improvisation is not such a big part anymore (than it was years before). Usually we need a nice "baseline" (a guitar-melody, a nice drone or field-recording) and go from there.

5) Circle seems to take a big part in Troum philosophy, music and artworks. Where does that come from ? What kind of cultures/religions/mentalities fascinate you and influence you in your music ? Did you travel a lot to get such influences ?

The spiral (or circles) has so many different meanings in different cultures or religions, we don't relate to any specific meaning. What fascinates us is that the spiral is a very basic and archaic symbol, it represents the ability to go "to the origin" of something.

6) According to you, who are the bests ambient artists nowadays ? Are there some you would like to collaborate with in the near future ?

We don't like rankings, they can never justify music or any piece of art. What I like personally (BarakaH) you can see in my Drone Records descriptions for the mailorder or simply in what I put out on Drone Records and Substantia Innominata ! For Martin its similar. We have many collaborations in the works or planned, with REUTOFF, AIDAN BAKER, CISFINITUM, URE THRALL, RAISON D'ETRE, its a way of working we like as we can go to new areas.

7) You perform a lot of live shows in Eastern Europe, why do you think there aren't as many ambient fans in Western Europe ? For example in France, we can hardly gather 100 people for a Inade concert, even though we have great ambient artists and labels here.

Maybe its because - after the downfall of the Berlin wall and the Soviet empire - people in East Europe are more open-minded towards "experimental" culture and expressions, as they need to define a new way to live and have to overcome the old, without accepting the turbo-capitalism of the so called "western cultures". In West Europe many people feel rather mistrustful when it comes to the term "experimental". Why experiment at all, they want to continue their save life. Yes it could be a question of feeling anxious towards "the new".

8) What are your plans for the future ? Do you have a new album coming ? Equation Records will be soon do a rerelease of "Sen" on vinyl, was it hard to agree to separate a 60 min tracks because of that ? Will you work on the tracks so the transitions will be smoother ?

We have just released a brandnew CD-album on our own label Transtgredient with the title AIWS. It's the first real full-length album since many years, and contains our favourite tracks from the last years, all recorded still in an analogue way (before our 8-track machine got totally damaged). So to say our "last analogue recordings".

Other releases are indeed the SEN re-release (as do-LP) on Equation, which we left in its original state (we want to show the music as it was when it came out), and a new 7" vinyl named NARGIS for VIVA HATE Records in Berlin.

This year (2007) should also see a collection CD of early compilation material on SMALL VOICES (named SYMBALLEIN), and the re-release of the 10"-vinyls LJUBIMAYA and DAUR on ABGURD.

AND we are currently working on a full album for BETA-LACTAM RING RECORDS and hope to finish it soon, too... title is not clear yet.

9) Even though you became a reference in the dark ambient fields, there aren't many bands that do drone ambient with guitars like you do, whereas you can find tons of Lustmord and Raison D'être clones. How do you explain that? Is that because it's harder to compose like you do than using computers and electronic devices?

Yes, maybe people think that guitars are somehow more restricted (which is not really the case). We rather think that using a sampler or synth restricts the possibilities, as you can usually hear that someone used a sampler.

Surely it's also because we always listened to more "guitar-based" music when we were young, and not so much pure electronic stuff.

DRONE RECORDS SECTION

10) Let's start some questions about Drone Records now. How did you come up with the 7" only idea? Was the goal to promote new and unknown artists first in a short length format? How do you choose Drone Records artists? Do you always meet them face to face?

No, many of the artist I have never met face to face, obviously, as they come from around the world. Which means the label is also based on mail-art and tape-exchange ideas, it's an absolutely non-regional project.

I always loved vinyl and the 7"-format and thought it's a great format to explore something new indeed. To play a 7" can be almost like a ritual.

To be chosen as artist for Drone, I would emphasize the following points: Emotionally striking music, not running on clichés and well-known sounds, a good concept of the whole project (name, titles, philosophy behind it), a small "own universe" so to say!

11) Do you think vinyl still sounds better than CDs? Besides, thanks to elaborate packagings and colored vinyls, do you believe it's a start to struggle against downloading and peer to peer? Do you think p2p is harmful for underground music labels? Or is it a great thing to create a community of people that will ultimately buy the music they download?

Yes, I still think vinyl sounds better than CDs. The basics haven't changed, a CD sounds more "sterile", the different sound-layers of a musical piece are rather isolated than building a "whole". For some musical styles it can be an advantage though. I don't think that in the experimental underground there's a real struggle against downloading music. It's such a small scene (but global), and many listeners want the whole product with special packaging, seeing it more as a piece of art.

I think it's even good that some experimental music can spread wider through free downloading, the main thing is for me that this music that is so different from the standard stuff will get more listeners.

It's very existential music so to say, or as I name it "non-entertaining", it doesn't function like usual Pop- or Rock-music that sets you in a superficially good mood or gives you a nice background for drinking or working or whatever.

I think more listeners would be able to explore the deep experiences you can have with "pure" sounds and music like Drones. There will always be collectors who buy the handmade packages, etc.. so seen as a whole the internet is not harmful at all for underground music, it's rather a blessing, makes networking easier and the access to the music.....

12) Drone Records has become a reference in Drone Ambient field, did you think it would be that way when you started it? Do you plan on releasing full albums, and not just Troum ones, maybe in 2xLPs format?

No, I really didn't expect that kind of "success" for Drone Records, though I'm aware it's still a tiny scene compared to any other "style". But indeed, when I started with the label early 1993 the notion "Drone" wasn't very common or often used in descriptions, even in the experimental scene (what was used more often was the term "ambient industrial"). This has really changed, it seems everyone with an interest in the more specialized music uses the word "Drone" these days and knows what it means.

I have no plans to release full vinyl-albums yet, but mainly of time-restrictions. Maybe it will change one day.

But I started (end of 2005) a 10"-vinyl (sub)-label named SUBSTANTIA INNOMINATA, which has a totally different concept as DRONE, but is really dedicated to the 10"-format which I also love (indeed, I love all three main vinyl-formats; eh eh)

SUBSTANTIA INNOMINATA lies its attention more on the "content", but in a paradox way: The artists that are doing the music & art for this series are asked to work about the "Unknown" or "Undefinable", whatever that means for them.

What we as humans know of the world and ourselves is only a small part (though we usually think we know so much), the most part is simply not recognizable for us. I think this is very striking and important for the understanding of the human existence, this whole huge "Unknown" is there and influences us more as we believe. It's really fascinating. And it also has an utopian side, whatever will happen to develop the human race, at the moment it is unknown to us, but it can be already based in our minds as a progressive force.

13) How did dark ambient evolve through the last decade? Do you think it's a good thing that thanks to computers and the internet we can see more and more new artists emerging?

It's good and bad at the same time. There are definitely too many artists around that produce rather boring or cliché-like stuff, that repeats itself over and over again. On the other hand it's good that everyone can try out to do something, it's the realization of the DIY-ideal. But it's basically like always: Everyone has to decide on his own what he/she selects, there are many ways to find out about interesting acts. Now with Myspace it's possible also to listen to all different kind of projects before you buy something. It's good, but the selection won't become easier.

14) Now that almosts paper magazines about ambient/electro/indus has disappeared (except a few fanzines), do you think it's up to the webzines to develop the community? There are now a lot of webzines that do only good reviews, that look like promo texts, just to have more and more free CDs from labels. Do you think we lack honest webzines, that can also write bad reviews, even when it's your own releases?

Of course, to become more serious the webzines should write good and critical reviews. But in the area of paper-magazines there were also good and bad ones. The media has changed but not the approach.

And I don't think the paper-magazines will completely die out. It's so comfortable to take a nice magazine with you and read it wherever you want. Many people sit in front of the computer all day, and then in their free time they should read a magazine also online? I don't think this is the best solution yet. We need something portable.

15) Currently what do you think are the best ambient labels (with yours :p) nowadays ? A lot of people think that the reference in dark ambient is now Cyclic Law from Canada, instead of Cold Meat Industry as it used to be, do you feel the same way ? Indeed, in the dark ambient realm CYCLIC LAW is setting new standards. COLD MEAT as a whole has a different approach, is much more neo-classic & noise-oriented (and nowadays even folk). For me personally the best ambient-labels of all times must be MYSTERY SEA and TAALEM, they are very small and only produce CDs, but with a high-standard, and they give room to new and unknown acts. But there are so many more great ones, like AFE RECORDS, and many others...

16) Germany has a big ambient/industrial scene (the biggest in Europe I think), with big labels such as Drone Records, Loki Foundation, Tesco Organisation etc... Do you think it's a direct consequence of the 70's/80's electronic scene with great artists such as Klaus Schulze, Tangerine Dream, and all the Berlin School, or is it something else ?
No, I really don't think that the scene here is "big" or that you can call Drone Records a "big label", with editions of 300 copies its absolute outsider-music still. And it all, in my perspective, has absolute nothing to do with 70's german electronic music. Maybe a label like STAUBGOLD is influenced by this, but not the industrial or experimental ambient-labels.
It all started with the Industrial-movement 1976/1977 and its further developments into post-industrial and experimental ambient and drone stuff, when i started Drone I wasn't very aware of any 70's electronic music, of course I knew it existed but it wasn't really an influence.

17) How is Drone Records (and Troum) seen in foreign continents such as america, asia or even africa and oceania ?
Not easy to say but I think there are only very very few listeners or fans in Asia and Australia, much more in North-America, and probably almost none in Africa. I think 90% of the listeners come from Europe (counting Russia as european country) & North-America, but I hope "other continents will follow" (yeah!).

18) Did you ever thought or dreamed about doing a Drone Records festival ? Is that something that would be doable in Germany ?

It is maybe not very known but I indeed DID small Drone Records-festivals in the early 90's !! They were named "Drone-Extract". There was one in Emden (Germany) near our hometown in October 1993 with SMALL CRUEL PARTY, MOHR, BEEQUEEN, MAEROR TRI, and three other ones (1994-1996) with (amongst others) FEINE TRINKERS BEI PINKELS DAHEIM, PARA-NOISE-TERMINAL, MAEROR TRI, NOISE-MAKER'S FIFES, VANCE ORCHESTRA, ULTRA MILKMAIDS, DAS ERDWERK. I stopped this series after the festival in 1996 as the losses were too high.

19) Let's talk about "drones" now. In the 90's, drones were a term used for ambient only. Nowadays, we have a lot of metal bands doing "drone" with heavy guitars, such as Sunn o))), Nadja (with Aidan Baker), Fear Falls Burning (aka Vidna Obmana), and even "folk drones" with Ginnungagap and their great album "Remeindre". A lot of people see drones as the singing performed by native americans, a hypnotic and very low chant taking your mind in a second state. Do you have the same feeling about drones ? Do you think it's great that a lot of different music styles now also try to create the "drone state of mind" ?
Yes, it seems that "Drone" as a style but also as a way of experiencing at special mind-state has become more popular. As long as its not a stupid "fashion", I can only welcome that. A "Drone" is indeed a very archaic and basic sound, I would say it is even more than just a "style", it's rather an entity or a "way of being". It can give you very existential feelings if you drown into a drone. The Drone reflects something eternal - it was always there, and it will always be there: the basic frequency of existence, the fact that "something is there". Everything is build on certain frequency-waves, and the Drone somehow reflects that.
It also gives space for the psychic mind, like an acoustic shelter. A Drone is more than "just music", it can work on an micro- and macro-cosmic level, and give you the basic feeling that everthing is one, that all things are linked together.

20) What do you think of "new age ambient" artists, that also use drones, but in a softer way, such as Oöphoi, and his label Umbra Records, Klaus Wiese, or Alio Die and his ambient works ? Do you feel close to them in a matter of spiritual thoughts ?
Yes I like many of these works very much though there is a border when it becomes "too new agey" in a way.

21) For our french readers, what do you know about the french ambient scene ? I also see another country evolving in the ambient/industrial scene, Poland, with great labels such as Beast of Prey and Wrotycz (who just released a great tribute to Zdzislaw Bekski). Have you heard about those labels ?
Yes sure, I was always interested especially in the polish and east-european experimental scene. Also Russia has quite many good new artists these days. What do I know about the french ambient scene? I know TAALEM, I know the FEAR DROP-mag, NUIT ET BROUILLARD, all from the very beginning. I think I have a good overview, but you never can know everything.

22) Do you have another job besides Troum and Drone Records or is your life dedicated to music ? A lot of labels owners and musicians (actually almost everybody) in ambient scene can't live on their music and have to work aside. Do you think it will be harder and harder to create music, start labels etc... ?
Since I finished my studies (in 2004) I try to live alone from the Drone-mailorder (thats in fact the only of my activity that earns money). Before that, I had many jobs / and studied and had to do all musical activities and the label & mailorder in the spare time. It's great to dedicate the "life" to music alone and live from it, but for many other things then (I do not only interest myself in music) there's almost no time left, for example:
- I like go to cinema very much and watch crazy french films with difficult french girls!
- I would love to write articles again (like my diploma-work) on the psychoanalysis and psychology of (experimental) music, but you need so much time for it
- I live 300 metres beeline from the big football-stadium of Werder Bremen. It's impossible not to watch football games from time to time here!
- I even was member of a choir here, covering Schlager- and other strange songs.
- I still like taking drugs man
- and of course, I love travelling to different countries, especially Italy at the moment, or just go out to nature and see the plants grow and animals walking & flying around. yeah.

I think "JUST NOW" is always "the best time" to create a label or do music, if you really want it, just do it, and you will be successful (if you don't judge it only by finances or the amount of records you sell). Try to NOT submit to the usual rules of capitalism, and you can only WIN.