

Interview with Paul Willeme for Dark Entries, August 2003

How do you look back on these 10 years & 60 Drones?

With pleasure, and a bit nostalgic. These were 10 years of discovering many great artists and sounds from all over the world, of getting in touch personally with many people and making friends, and finding out the existential importance of music for myself. Nostalgic because when I started everything was working on snail mail, after a while you got lots of letters every day, and flyers were sent around like crazy. It's hard to imagine this now, but the whole thing worked quite well... and it was really sort of undergroundish.

Surely it was a lot of work to build the label and keep it running, but it never seemed like "real" work. It happened because it's what I do with my life, it's NOT just a sort of "business". So I see the whole label-project on two levels: what it could mean for the "outer world", as a small cultural manifestation or objectivation, and the meaning for my "inner world", as a transformation of strong inner desires and motivation.

It doesn't seem to me that 10 years have already really passed, and still I'm excited about any new drone 7" that comes out. 10 years is nothing, if you regard it as a realization or manifestation of a rather timeless cultural "idea": the communication through atmospheric "thinking" and feeling.

One of the aims of the label is releasing unknown & starting artists rather than the established ones. Most of the artists who had a release on Drone Records are quite well-known names now. Must be satisfying?

Yes, it is indeed, and this is really one of the aims & approach of the label (to release the more unknown or new artists). But it's not a dogma. To see some of the projects presenting on Drone suddenly getting more and more attention is a bit like "spreading the word". Drone always only does one 7" of each project so it can always be only the first or a small instigator for others to follow. But there were also Drones of excellent groups that stayed totally unknown afterwards, like the wonderful hungarian HIDEG RONCS, or dutch INDRA KARMUKA. Some also did only one or few releases under a special name (like ERDWERK) but developed further and work under other names these days. But in general it seems, the release on Drone serves as a kind of starting-point for many, and this makes me very lucky.

How do you feel about the compilation that will commemorate the 10th anniversary? Why is it released by Tumult & not by yourself?

It's NOT a 10th anniversary release ! Tumult Records from San Francisco offered it a long time ago and I thought it's a good idea to put out tracks from drone-releases for the first time on CD (as there are still people without record-players existing, haha). I liked the idea to have this released on a totally different label from the US. For me it would have been way too much work to release something like this on my own, I want to concentrate further on the vinyl-series.

Are you satisfied with the tracklist? Were you involved or consulted on the choices of projects included?

I am indeed satisfied, I gave Andee (Tumult Records) the full decision on which tracks he wanted to use. I don't see myself as a "owner" of these tracks or this music.

Most of the tracks included span the years 1997 to 2000, & almost all of the Drones 30 to 43. Any specific reason for this?

The choice was finished a few years back, so no newer material since then was included. The label-owner had serious private obstacles to overcome, so the whole was set back for some time...and as I said, the tracklist was a personal choice of Tumult Records. I see it as an additional possibility for the Drone-projects or the Drone-idea to get attention, I didn't want to create the "perfect product" based on my own choice. I'm sure the final product will be very nice.. also Stephen O'Malley (Lotus Eaters / SUNN O:) is doing the artwork, so it will look very good !

How do you decide who gets a release on Drone Records? Do artists send you their music, or do you contact them with an offer?

Both ways are possible, but these days I receive very much demos so usually it's this way now.

Are there any artists you would have liked to release but who refused?

Yes, but I don't want to go too much into detail. There were some projects I contacted who were interested first, but out of different reasons the release wasn't realized.

Where will Drone Records go now? Will you maintain the concept for another 10 years?

Yes, as long as there's good new drone-music around, I will probably going on with it. But who knows what the future will bring? Maybe I collect stamps in 5 years from now? Or latex-clothes? (private note: didn't we have the discussion before, eheh ?) At least I can say I'm not bored at all. And for the listeners it's the same I hope.

What will happen in the near future on the label?

This month (August 2003) sees re-releases of three drone-EPs, by TAM QUAM TABULA RASA (actually a very old one from 1995, appeared as DR-10, but as the group is quite active again these days..), TARKATAK (DR-34) and one that got quite famous by argentinian group REYNOLS (DR-42). Due for September are new drones by NO XIVIC (Finland), ENTRELACS (US/France), CHRISTIAN DERGARABEDIAN aka C.D. (Spain) and EMERGE (Germany). After that fixed plans are already made for SOLEILKRAAST (France), CISFINITUM (Russia), OVUM (Sweden), etc.. a list that should never end!

To end with, the Drones have become an item for collectors. What's your opinion about that?

hmmm...collecting as a phenomena has interesting inner-psychological implications, and it also shows at which degree we have all internalized a thinking that is based on VALUE (in Marxs understanding), we can't view on things as mere things but always see them also as an equivalent to money. As a consequence, one could even say: in capitalism, real art is not existing - what is created is always a "product" similar to others, with an inherent value expressed in money. It is hard to imagine an art-product with no money-value (and that's what I mean when I say we have internalized value-thinking, as the basic principle of capitalism). I think now that's one of the basic motivations of Drone Records - the urge to release music-art that is not based on value, that has a value you can't measure with money. Although I know it's not possible it's the idea what counts.

Concerning Drone: at least it was not the intention at all to create collector's items when the first Drones appeared. But then e-bay wasn't existing, and the whole scene was smaller, and to sell 200 copies of a totally unknown experimental project wasn't that easy. Now I see that with the special concept (handmade or selfmade covers by the artists, colour-vinyl, lim. first edition) Drone 7"es can surely become collector's items after some time, something you can't prevent... and I don't want to change the whole concept only because of this reason... and what can I say, I am a collector myself, but there are boundaries... I hate this e-bay money-making with certain release-strategies (no names here, but you all know examples I guess), "famous" people bring out stuff that is limited and crazily priced and sell single copies on their own on e-bay for even more... but I think Drone is still very far away from this: when Drones appear, they don't cost you a million, and if you order directly in time there will always be enough copies (best thing is to get a subscription). Also, there will always be second editions pressed when there are enough requests, so that the MUSIC (and that's what counts in the end, right?) will stay available.