



Idea Fire Company



"We Put Out Ideas"

Idea Fire Company comprises Scott Foust and his wife Karla Borecky, but the membership of IFCO as a band is somewhat elastic, as can be seen from the guest members and appearances on the records. At time of interview, two young ex-students were also reckoned as permanent members, although this situation may be about to change. Scott and Karla also play with Graham Lambkin as Tart; with Mike Popovich as The Pickle Factory; and with Mr and Mrs Borecky as The New Peculiars. Scott has been doing music professionally since 1981. He also operates the Swill Radio record label, mainly to showcase his own releases, but also to support bands he admires, including friends The Shadow Ring.

Of all the above musical projects, the music of IFCO and Tart is extremely hard to pigeon-hole; some listeners found The Pickle Factory slightly more approachable. For this and various other reasons, the work has been largely dismissed or ignored for a long time in the USA. Perhaps they need to aim at a European market. At all events, the music has always followed its own wayward and obstinate path and can't be conveniently aligned with the current burgeoning 'underground' noise, folk, free jazz and psych improv crossover scenes flaming across the USA (and gathering much journalistic interest, including from TSP). This works against them too. Indeed, Borecky (who has had musical training) is less than impressed by the formlessness and directionless nature of much of said music, which she finds self-indulgent and unproductive. Foust likewise regards the profligacy and promiscuity of these 'scenes' with suspicion, seeing it as indicative of a lack of discipline, undernourished by real ideas or thinking.

TSP has long been a champion of Swill Radio records, frequently praising the unusual, imaginative and tightly-edited music, and the obvious thought and care that goes into them. Plus we're suckers for vinyl-only product. If you ever buy a Swill Radio record, you may encounter a number of theoretical and political subtexts in the song titles and published inserts; references to the Situationists, the death of capitalism. You may even be directed to the Swill Radio or Anti-Naturals homepage, where (amongst the bewildering artworks and poetry) you'll encounter yet more polemic – some of it quite forbiddingly intellectual in tone. Like the Anti-Naturals theorising, it is calculated to hit us right where we live, and raise uncomfortable questions about things we'd prefer to take for granted.

This reminded me of something. My old art-school acquaintance (who later become a vegan anarchist) evinced interest in records by Crass around 1981. He pointed out how he thought Crass cleverly 'smuggled' their radical ideas into the mainstream. A punk or music fan might buy a Crass record just because they were punks, or liked punk music; they would open the box set, only to find a lot of anarchist literature within, or mailing lists that could put you in touch with other anarchist contacts. It was as though Crass were using punk music, and in particular the record-buying impulse, as a vehicle for delivering something else entirely. I've never subscribed to the anarchist line of thought, but the means to the end that Crass were using struck me as interesting.

Was Foust doing something similar, I wondered? I tended to assume he was a political radical of some sort, but I was completely wrong. Foust revealed how he hates political art, and stresses his interest is in creating something beautiful. The truth is – and it took Phil Todd to hit me over head to realise it – Foust is an aesthete, and is mainly interested in theory for its intellectually stimulating value. True, Guy Debord may be one of his mentors, but he gets more of a buzz from the humour and self-centredness of said writer than from the critical content. Borecky's motivation is far from political; she too simply loves to make music. Through Foust's influence, she found a way to improve on her grounding in classical music and popular song, extending her imaginative reach into new forms of abstract music.

The Anti-Naturals theory was mainly devised by sociology professor and author Dr Timothy Shortell. Its central tenet might have been better expressed as a positive instead of a negative. Borecky stresses how the theory is not 'against nature'. What it's in *favour* of is people taking responsibility for their lives. The line of reasoning is that most people try and explain away their actions, with resigned statements about the inevitability of 'human nature'. This particularly makes sense in the USA, the country that practically invented blame culture, victim culture, and instant litigation available to all, as an assumed 'right' of citizenship. The UK is ending up the same way unfortunately. Well, do we really want to be a nation of cry-babies who can't wait to bring a legal action against a big corporation the minute we stub our toe in a McDonalds restaurant? Or would we rather act like grownups, and live with the consequences of our actions?



Karla Borecky, Scott Foust

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That, I think, is what Anti-Naturals is 'Anti'. It's a model of thinking that reflects the aestheticisation angle too. It might work as an additional dimension to help orientate the listener, rather than a prescriptive set of rules. Foust, never one to sell himself short, would like to place his work in an avant-garde lineage that might include Surrealism, concrete poetry, and post-punk bands like This Heat, Gang of Four and The Pop Group. Both he and Karla seem to be particularly critical, of themselves and their work; Anti-Naturals is simply one more strategy that enables self-improvement, and continual development.

I say all this for the benefit of potential listeners and readers who may have ventured near the IFCO / Swill Radio universe, only to have been put off by these 'difficult' first hurdles. It is possible, if you only read statements on the website, - for example "The total aestheticization of experience requires an ongoing act of the will" - that the whole deal might seem pretentious, exclusive and solemn. Careful listening to the music, however, should reveal where their values really lie: in deep commitment to exploring and playing beautiful music, using imagination and intelligence, trusting in strong band-member interaction, valuing intuition, deploying economy, editing, and a rigorous quality control.

My visit to Swill Radio house coincided with the completion of the movie *Here's To Love*, which Foust soon hopes to make available on DVD. A few months later, Swill Radio was hit by a financial setback which means that the next LP – *Stranded*, by IFCO – may turn out to be the last. This is something which I continue to regard as 'the curse of *Sound Projector*. Don't let me interview you, if you want a career in music! (EP)

Interviews took place 29 –30 April 2005
Location: IFCO headquarters, Amherst, MA, USA

SF = Scott Foust
KB = Karla Borecky
EP = Ed Pinsent

EP Tell me this history of the Idea Fire Company.

KB IFCO started around 1987, 1988. That's when we recorded a lot of [the material]. I'm a little blurry. The first record came out around 1989. We wish now we'd put the dates on the records, because you always think you'll remember and then [you forget]. We do have Scott's list of everything he's ever done. You're an archivist, that's your professional interest! I knew Scott when he was in Anschluss and I actually performed with them once. Carnegie Mellon. It was a disaster!

SF I'd got together with Karla by then, and we started the Idea Fire Company. So we did *Explosion in a Shingle Factory*. The first two Idea Fire Company double LPs [were very continuous]. I think the second one's better. *The Fourth Dimension Is Money* didn't really [do well], but I actually sold all of those and I think it's a very good record. Although last time I listened to *Fourth Dimension*, there's only about five minutes of it I would actually take out, so that's not so bad. And then when *Anti-Natural* came out I thought this is such a better record that people will really like it. But it seemed to pick up very poor reviews, it seemed to alienate all the quote-unquote fans that we had. But I think it's a much better record than the first two.

KB The [name] Idea Fire Company actually came from...there was a part of town, one of them had this [sign] that said Ideal Fire Company. I don't know if their L was gone or what, but Scott thought that would be a funny name for a band. Of course, our slogan was 'We Put Out Ideas.' Ha ha ha!

SF In 2002 the membership changed. When Tart started we put Idea Fire Company on the back burner for a little while, and I just didn't really think we could do a record that was as good as *Anti-Natural*. So we had Jessi Swenson and Meara O'Reilly perform as guests at a show once. And it worked out so well that we started working on recording new material. And so now the lineup, at least

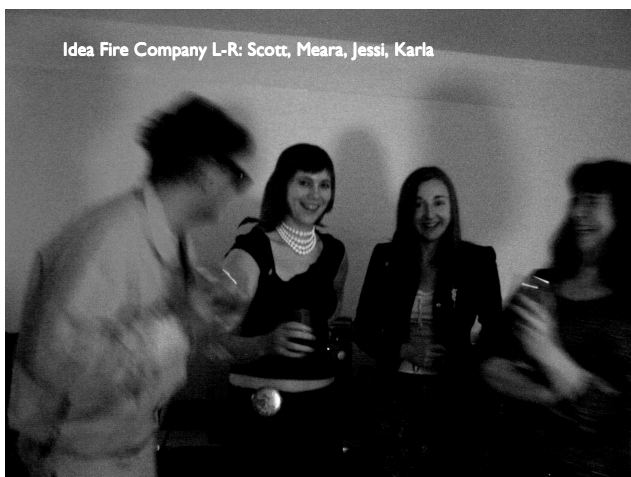


for this moment, is a quartet with me and Karla and Jessi and Meara. Karla and Jesse play synths, Meara plays a keyboard, and I do radio and tapes. And the girls all sing.

KB Right. We had one of our Anti-Naturals nights and I played with Jessi and a friend that night. I played the guitar, and I like finding something repetitive and trancey. I took guitar lessons, but that was a while ago. I know how they work and that the frets are half-steps, but I just pretty much [stop there]. There was something about when Jessi and I played together. She was also playing in a repetitive way. We really played well together. We knew Meara was interested too. So I guess Scott thought it would be fun to have a band with three women. But also I knew we could do vocals together. Which I really liked, and [whereas before] usually I would have to record all the parts, having other people who could sing them at the same time really opened it up. I liked that. I think they like it too. Meara had piano lessons. She's a more melodic person. What we do is divide them up into the melodic versus the non-melodic, [depending on] backgrounds. It was a unique combination and we really thought they had good sensibilities, like they understood the thing where everybody's playing a part.

EP So everybody in the band is clear they have a role to play.

KB That's right, and nobody's trying to stick out like the big star and poke out more than anybody else. And so everybody brought their own little thing to it. Meara has a number of weird musical instruments, she has little funny keyboards and she has a set of tuning forks. They have good sensibilities, and I really liked adding the vocal dimension to [the music]. I look at it as just another sound. I've even thought about talking with them about recording harmony things together. I love Anonymous Four. And I've always loved that kind of layered harmony part work music. It does look impressive [with four band members] ...and here's the other funny thing, when we played the first show. I usually sit down to play. But at this one show, there were no chairs or whatever, and it just came out that we had to stand. I was nervous about it at first. But it really changed the way people [in the audience] reacted to us. It was like they took us more seriously, when we were standing there, it gave us more authority or whatever. There are so many performances where people are just sitting down and noodling away. And even though we're sort of noodling, it looked very majestic. We played this show at Hampshire, and there was this



great big glass, a wall of windows behind us, so we were lit up from behind. I guess it looked very impressive!

HOW MUSIC GETS MADE – TART and IFCO

EP What would be the starting point in the process of realising a piece of music?

SF It's not always the same. One thing it depends on is what the group is I'm working with at the time. With Tart, we played a lot together early on, and developed. The first album was a wide-open thing, where we wanted to leave ourselves lots of room to explore different directions further up down the road. So we tried to put a bunch of disparate material on [that album], *Radio Orange*. And by the time of *Bring In The Admiral* we had played a fair amount of live shows, and played together a lot. And Graham and Karla and I really settled into a niche of what we'd each do. And that's the only band I would play with now without a rehearsal, because I feel real comfortable.

KB When we first started, because I was just kind of raw, and Scott he would say 'I want something to go with this'. He would have a piece he'd recorded or he would say something with a vague guideline, and I would listen to it and noodle around, and come up with something I thought went with it. Then record it. So that was how we started. And then, [increasingly], I would start things – like for instance in Tart, I get a little vocal sample on the little Casio keyboard. Then I'll play it on a loop or repeat it. Sometimes it's kind of embarrassing, cause I would just pick up the keyboard and put my mouth up to it! If I had a microphone it would be so much less embarrassing! Especially because I don't want people to hear the little sound I'm making. I feel that takes away from the magic of it. Then later on, I accidentally managed to sample something that had a little ambient sound of the room, like a click or maybe there was a piece of Scott's guitar. I like to set up the rhythm. And then I play it in different keys. The thing about the Casio, the higher you go, the faster it repeats. So it mirrors the pattern, the frequencies of the keys, so if I do an octave then it's exactly twice as fast. And I then know that if I put those together it'll match the pattern. Plus it changes the note as well, because it's a higher-pitched thing.

SF With IFCO, half the material on the records was [derived from] band get-together, messing around, finding bits that are good. And there's some tape work

There are many ways. I don't really have a set process. It's the people, it's more about the people. That's what I really love about music. It's a really interesting way of interacting with people, nothing else is quite the same as that. Which of course is good if the people are sensitive and interactive, but bad if they're just egotistical and try to show off or be loud or whatever it is.

EP When recording, is everything improvised, or are any plans made?

KB Yeah, we sort of [improvise]. What we do is we improvise to find something, and when I find something good I play around with it. I know Scott always hated playing with [proper] musicians, because they can't really *get it*, you know? With IFCO when we first did it, some of it [was improvised]...there's one side of a record where's it's almost all this keyboard thing that I made up as I went along. But I do repeat patterns within it, it's not all [free improvisation]. Sometimes we work things out ahead of time. Like with Tart, we'll come up with [a plan]...each person has a thing they're gonna play. Within that structure, we all do the thing where we're gonna repeat and do variations. It's disciplined, it's not like everyone just does their own thing. Occasionally somebody else will throw in something, especially Graham or Scott, they'll throw in a little dramatic [shape] or whatever. And I'm always [very dismissive]! None of that for me, you know! But that's good. That's their thing, it's not my thing. It's not conventional improvisation really. It's only improvised when we first figure out what we're

doing. We always kid about it, that if we make a mistake, we'll just repeat it! Hit a sour note, then just hit it again! Because then it sounds more purposeful!

EP Do you know about musical theory, chord structures...?

KB Yes, but I just use that as a tool. I try sometimes to tell other people who don't know [these things], you can just give them hints about what kind of things go together, because I know...and they can either use that, or they can use that in a negative way. You know, the [conventional] expectation would be that you would do this, this chord would go with this, but they do something else.

EP Did IFCO onwards open up a new avenue of expression for you?

KB Oh, it did. Oh, absolutely. When Scott would play things for me, it was good, because it broke this little bubble I was in. That I enjoyed, but I couldn't really create within it. I took things that I knew that I liked the way they sounded, and I had a way to use them in a different way. The building blocks that I had, I had a way to put them together that before, I didn't. It was very amorphous, and this crystallised it for me. I realised that, if you only hear typical kinds of song structures then it's not really on your radar, all this kind of odd music.

EP The interesting thing about the dynamics of the various groups, and I realise it depends very much on the people involved, but it's not like the dynamics of an ordinary band. It's almost like someone has sat down and reinvented what a band could be.

KB I think it's like when Graham and Scott and I came together, when we all met up. We played a radio show and Graham played with us, and that's how [Tart] came about. We decided we were going to record and have a new thing together. So I think it was something that we each came to on our own. It's sort of an odd combination...you're improvising, but really within a very strict [framework]. Each person has their own little set of rules for

whatever it is they're playing, I feel. We don't really talk about it, it just happens. We've had times where one person was way too loud. But we're not gonna be rude and say Shh! And sometimes it will have gone on a little long and Scott will chop it off. We really try to do repetition things, so in that way it's more like a song [than an improvisation] I think. But we don't really talk about it much.

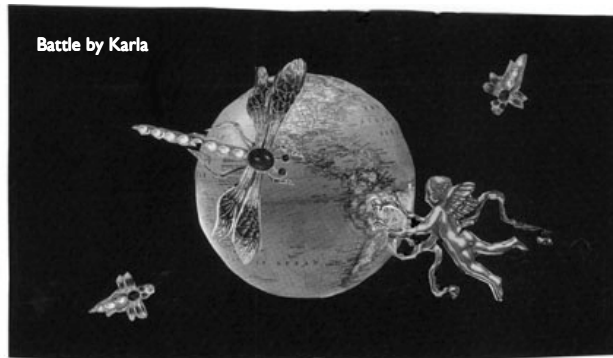
EP I think there's a lot of bands would give their eye-teeth to have that kind of rapport.

KB You think? You know, a friend of ours said when they were with Harry Pussy that everyone in the band was constantly screaming at each other. To them, that was part of the process of coming up with the song, was everybody screaming and fighting!

SELECTION AND EDITING

EP I've always felt that the quality control of the finished product is a point of pride with you.

SF Yes, and you're absolutely correct. Because I don't really like the idea of tons of releases that come out. I always like to say that Beethoven couldn't make six good LPs in a year, much less someone else. I think a lot of people would do a lot better if they were a bit more selective about putting their releases together with care. Often you hear an 80 minute CD, and you know there's 20 minutes of material that if it were organised better it would be fantastic. But it isn't! I don't record all that often. I don't like having things that are great sitting around that I have no way to release. It's not good to sit in there every day and plunk away, because I think you develop habits. And I love letting it sit, like letting IFCO sit for seven years. We did these sporadic live shows now and again but mostly let it sit. That has a really positive effect. I've never been a good musician, really. I wouldn't say I could play any instrument at all.



EP I notice you don't release absolutely everything you record by any means.

KB It's funny you should say that, because I would [like to record more]. We do have [unreleased] material that we've recorded. Scott, his feeling was he doesn't like to record anything until (a) the other thing gets put out and (b) if it's not for a specific thing to be put out, he doesn't like to just noodle around. Partly I think the reason we don't put out as much is because I work, and some of the work I have to do for the records, so the amount of time I get to devote to that work sometimes gets limited. And it's partly money, too. A lot of those [other] people are just constantly recording and putting out every little thing that they play. I don't really like that. We always say we don't think every single note that we record is good.

EP One of the things I've noticed in the back catalogue of your records is the very deliberate editing and selection of music.

SF The real selection [process] is recording stuff and listening back to it a lot, and try to figure out what's good and what works and how to edit it. One of the things I'm really concerned with is the pacing of LPs. I think that's another area people really neglect. They'll just throw stuff on in any sort of order. It just doesn't seem to make sense. One of the things about *Anti-Natural* and *Radio Orange*, *Bring In The Admiral* and *Stranded* that I'm really happy with is the sequencing. And I'm not saying me personally, there's a lot of band input too, but there's almost more time spent on that than spent on the actual playing. Listening, selecting, putting things in the right order, and saying maybe this certain piece doesn't work, is there some way to make it work? Is there some bit of it that could be used for something else?

EP And is that process just done by you?

SF No. I do the nuts and bolts, the dirty edit tape work...not entirely, because Graham does it as well. But also all of that is talking about the music with the people in the band. With Idea Fire Company, I'm working the knobs, but I wouldn't say it's all sprung from my mind, no. The idea of having a group is having as much group interaction as possible.

EP And there is one particular record, *Anti-Natural*, where it seems like there's a complex hidden structure on side one, where if you listen to it enough you can tell that there's repeated sections...

SF Yeah, there are. And that was just a lucky accident! There's a lot of really short pieces that are very similar, that I used as buffers between the other tracks on the LP. When I first put it together I was just messing about. I was just so excited because they're very short and they made the other tracks seem very long and spacious, and I thought it really pulled that record right together, from just being another droney synth record.

KB We just played for a long time. Then we thought it would not have been good as a single piece. So just chop it up! And we gave each [section] a different name. Graham noticed that it's actually all part of the contiguous piece.

EP That's the record that made me think, as some music does, that it's possible to contain a tremendous amount of information within music.

SF In a very subtle way, yes. I do that a lot, and I'm not really sure if anyone ever notices, but I notice, and people, friends of mine notice, so...that's good enough.

KB I think the only problem is the first thing you hear on the record is that crazy whooping thing. I told Scott, I like starting with this but I think it's gonna put people off it. I thought if anybody listens to this, they're not gonna wait to get to what I consider to be the pretty parts, because they're gonna hear that and think 'oh, no!'. And this is why Scott called that one 'On Your Toes Intellectuals'.

INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS

EP What instruments do you play?

SF I've had a Korg, an MS 10, since my first band, which started in 1979. I probably got the Korg in 1980. I've just had the same equipment all these years. And especially with analogue synthesizers, the longer I've had it...I can always find something new with it, and that's really nice. So I've never really bought



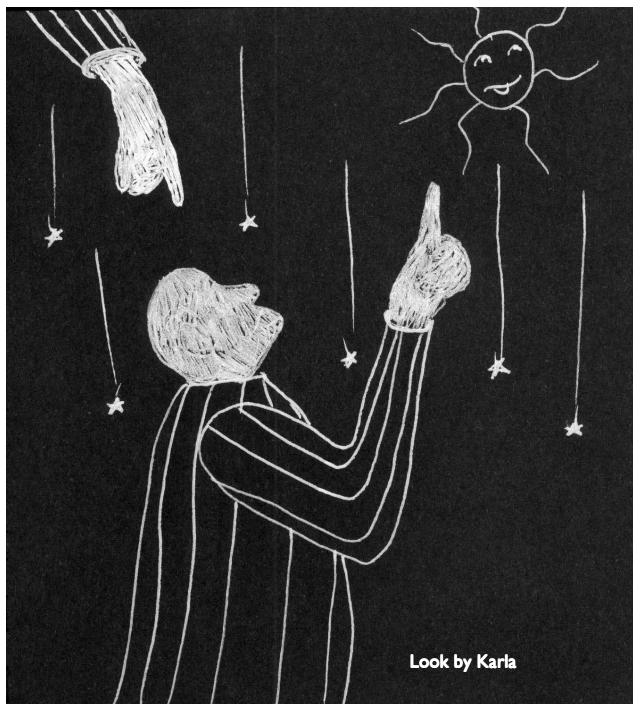
another one. And they're so expensive. I think it's better just to get to know your instrument. If you just keep at something, keep trying to find things, you get a lot better results, than always getting something new and turning the dial. And then you just end up having the same sound that's on everyone else's records because everyone else is buying the same new gear. I'm not even sure what that Korg [can do] – I don't sit and play it every day, but I still sometimes will turn a knob or put a patch in and – ooh, I've never heard that before! And that's why I really like those analogue synthesizers, because to me they're always surprising.

KB A lot of the times I play keyboard. I was trained and I took piano lessons, and I had keyboards from when I'd played in bands when I was a youngster, cover bands. But then when I met Scott I realised playing something that was more unusual would fit better with what I [already] knew how to do. Which was nice. Before, I felt like I had no talent! In the Idea Fire Company I have an RMI keyboard computer, it's a multiphonic keyboard. It takes punchcards. I played that on a lot of the [records], the big organ sounding thing. The music that sounds like Krautrock, but the thing was I hadn't really heard Krautrock, so I didn't know! It was a combination of [things]. I knew classical music, and I studied with a piano teacher who was a jazz guy, so I learned all the different chord combinations. I guess I'm more like the melodic person, and Scott would add in the non-melodic or odd touches. That's what a lot of our patterns are. Although lately I do occasionally play the more sound-scape kind of thing. But more often I play a pattern. One time a drummer friend of ours said to me that he thought for Tart I was like the drummer. I like to find a repetitive melodic pattern. I like to produce a trance-like thing now, I like to find something that I find interesting or usually pretty, but also hypnotic almost.

SF There's a lot of tape manipulation stuff, but the way we do it is all very primitive really – and this goes for the IFCO records and Tart records as well. Taking a tape made on a four-track and playing it on a regular tape machine so it's half the speed. We don't really have fancy digital editing gear or anything, it's just very

primitive. When you have limits on yourself, you're really forced to work harder. And think more. All art could use more *thinking!* Thinking about what it's supposed to do. I just don't believe in that [idea] where it just shoots out of you, and there it is. The more you're limited by not having so many options, so you have to explore the options you have deeper. You really have to work hard to try to get something out of them that's good. I think that's always helped me a lot.

KB Two friends of ours had this conversation...one thought that if you have a limited thing that you can work with, that it makes you more creative. Whereas the other thought he wanted to have whatever percussion things you could possibly think of that he



might want to use them at a certain show, he wants them all there. Scott said about the XX Committee that their biggest influence was their lack of equipment. I think that's true.

SF With us, it's all very hands-on. We don't have very much equipment. Karla and I have like two or three synthesizers, a couple of guitars and a couple of amps, Casio keyboards...but it's not like huge banks and walls of electronics and stuff. I know Graham uses much less equipment than I do. He barely uses anything for those Shadow Ring records.

THE AUDIENCE

EP Your music is very hard to pigeon-hole. Sometimes it seems that audiences can't quite get the hang of what to make of it, how to process it. Do you have any sense of an audience engaging with the music?

KB One of the best times we played where people actually seemed to get it was at the Middle East Cafe in Cambridge near Boston. A lot of people sat down, people were swaying a little bit, which was what I think when I listen to our music, when it's going good it's hypnotic, and engaging. That's one of the things I like about music, I like it to absorb me to the point where I don't really think about [it] being a record. And it doesn't have to necessarily be repetitive, any kind of good music to me is like that. You're just caught up with it. So that [show] was really neat, because people really seemed to get it. Now there are other times when we play, sometimes with noise bands, and I think that maybe they thought we weren't noisy enough. If we play for people who were there because they want to see one of those improv bands where the members change all the time, I think they think we're too boring. 'Cause we're repetitive, we're not all jamming or whatever! (laughs) I've enjoyed listening to some improv shows, especially when there's just a few people, but even though you would say that they're always different, to me they all sound the same. It's like a blur of different sounds, there's nothing that gives it a

structure, and so in that there's nothing to grab onto. So undifferentiated. You can't remember, you can't repeat any of the music in your mind of what you listened to that really struck you. You can remember that they really built up at one point and got really big and they came down, but there's no real musical impact on you.

EP So there are all these musical modes going on in the contemporary underground, and you don't really sit alongside any of them very well.

KB I know, but it works against us in some ways, because I think if people can't put a label on it or somehow categorise it or decide whether it's important or not, then we get ignored. By the same token, it's probably just as well. I think we're not trying to do music that's "original", we just do music that we think sounds good. It's the same problem if you're trying to sound 'weird', then it's just ridiculous.

THE SHADOW RING AND GRAHAM LAMBKIN

EP I think the *Lighthouse* double LP is one extraordinary record in the catalogue...

SF Oh, that was fantastic! It's really a Shadow Ring record...we sent them tapes of material, but Graham and Darren put that together for the most part. I think had we not been separated by geography, we might have worked on the music together.

EP When did you meet Graham Lambkin?

SF It was when *Put The Music In It's Coffin* came out, and I was just so excited by it, I just thought it was fantastic! So I wrote him a fan letter and sent him a copy of *The Fourth Dimension Is Money*. He wrote me back. And oddly enough, he already had *The Fourth Dimension Is Money*. But he gave the copy to Darren, and we started talking and seemed to have a lot in common. He's a very interesting artist, and we both have a lot of different ideas that have helped each other. It's been very good knowing him. After he and Adris [Hoyos] got married he moved to Miami, and then he was a little more accessible. He'd come over once from the UK, I think that's when the first Tart record might have been made. Meeting him was very inspiring, he's a very talented artist. Very very good.

EP What is it that he actually does, in terms of the noise and music that he makes? He writes the poetry, doesn't he?

SF Yeah, he does the lyrics, and he does a lot of mixing, and field recordings. There are some instruments on the newest LP, *I'm Some Songs*, but a lot of tapes, and changing speeds of tapes. One of the things I liked about [him] when I met Graham was, it was obvious when I met him that he had [depth]. I don't really like sloppy, messy music at all, and you could tell from early on that The Shadow Ring had much bigger concerns than just messing about in the basement and making music. That's why we became friends so easily and quickly. I think The Shadow Ring's records show, much better than my own music, progression. If you look at them from *City Lights* [onwards], in every record there's more of something, less of something else. None of their albums are the same at all. Yet you could pick them out as The Shadow Ring immediately, and isn't that a feat! I think that's really [important].

THE NEW PECILIARS

EP Karla, your parents have been on one or two of the records. What's the story behind that?

KB The New Peciliars. You know, I'm not even sure how it got started. My dad, he played the violin when he was a kid. And my mom of course, she took piano lessons. I'm sure it was something Scott thought up, but he decided we were gonna do this anti-rock band. It was just an anti-everything sort of style. Scott said it was funny because it's crazy to be in a band where he's the most proficient one on his instrument! Because I was playing drums, and I think I have a pretty good sense of rhythm but I'm really bad at anything complicated because I just haven't practised. And my mom was playing keyboards, which she sort of knew, and my dad was playing his violin. But the funny thing was even though my father seems like he's the [straight] one – my mother is the more eccentric one, and my dad is more the one who comically rolls his

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eyes about anything weird. But he actually got it! It was funny. He was playing his violin - at one point, you can hear it on the record, Scott and everybody are going 'Rhooh! Rhooh! Rhooh! Rhooh!' at the same time, and my dad joined in with them! I mean, I was in stitches! And my mom was in her own little world...everybody else was done, and at one point my mom was still noodling around, and not noticing that everybody else has stopped. So I took my drumstick and tapped on her keyboard! (Laughter) 'We're done now!' It was a lot of fun! We had two or three singles and Graham did the cover for two of them. I knew my parents would get a charge out of it, because my mother, one of the things that makes her laugh is when someone's singing off-key, especially if they're doing it on purpose to be funnier.

PERFORMANCE ART

EP Scott, can you tell us about these two new performance art things you're doing?

SF Yes, I originally started calling it sound poetry, but it's almost more like a theatre performance thing as much as it is sound poetry. It happened because a friend of mine asked me to a birthday party and he was having some people perform. So I worked out one piece, called 'Sorry to hear about your collapse', which is a dynamic sound-poetry piece. I use tapes too, it's not just me [talking]. And then I came up with another one called 'Der Saufel', which is German for 'The Drinker'. I'm really happy with that one. There's a third piece, a lecture piece, there's just tapes and I just sit there. And I've done three or four [performances]. I found it very enjoyable to show up at a show with only having to bring a microphone and a tiny tape machine and not having a band. That's easy.

EP Could you describe the drinker piece for our readers?

SF I did a tape collage of piano bits from some [German] Lieder and sounds of corks being pulled from bottles, and ice going into glass. And for the piece, I just basically pour myself a glass of whisky and have a drink and play the tape, and sit there and weep for about eight minutes. It is only eight minutes long, but I've had people say that it seems like it's twenty! When I did the show at the Yod shop, it was really funny because it was the first time I'd done that piece. And I've never seen the life sucked out of a room so effectively! Because the first piece is pretty dynamic and somewhat humorous, I think, at least it's up-tempo and has some changes in mood. With this second piece, people were expecting something likewise would happen, there'd be some sort of punchline. But three minutes in, everyone started to sense that nothing was gonna happen, except the weeping! I have to say it was one of my most interesting experiences performing.

CRITICAL ART

EP I think also there's a content to your work that appears to be quite critical, critical of things as they are in the world today. Which may be imparted through your sound, making the listener feel uncomfortable, perhaps prompting the listener to think about certain things.

SF Yes, that's certainly true...I really think that I like art to be beautiful. Beautiful might not be the right word. I believe it has the power to do something, and I also believe that the world is in very very poor shape. And so I really can't do much - I mean, making a record, let's face it, isn't gonna do anything. But it's all I can really do! I look at my work as being directly [within] a modernist avant-garde lineage. What I like to try to do is tie the records in, in some way. I have the group the Anti-Naturals as a sort of avant-garde group, and records, and films, and writing, and I like to have all this be part of a whole. It all goes together. And as a critique of society, sometimes the way art is presented in society. But not hectoring people. I mean, my writing can be that way. I don't like political art at all! I think it's horrible! You're dated as soon as you come out the window. I am after maybe making people see that the world doesn't really have to be the way it is. So many things that people take for granted don't really have to be that way. And sure, the music may not by itself give anyone that impression. I don't know if it does or not. But I think with all the things together, it makes a picture. There's more and more of it, however deeply you want to get in, there's a sort of unity. Maybe that's what you were

talking about before, when you said how the music seemed unsettling. I try to have a unity of things.

EP I agree that there's no hectoring content in your music.

SF I understand the idea that maybe there's some issue right now that I feel needs to be addressed, but in a lot of ways that sort of thing is really a halfway measure. It isn't that these issues have appeared this minute. The problem is the entire organisation, the entire structure, reality, the way the world works today. I always find this with left-wing things. Oh, they'll pick an issue, but they won't critique Capital. Nobody [does]. In the US, you do not critique Capital. Or Religion, ever. It isn't gonna change the decay of the world in any way shape or form, to a big enough degree that it makes really any difference. At least I don't think so.

EP So would it be fair to say, you'd rather try and address the wider and deeper issues?

SF I believe that revolutionary ideas have to have revolutionary content, or presentation. In other words I don't believe folk songs about the problems in the world are really [valid]...they're missing the boat entirely. You have to go all the way! And if you really want to build a new world, you have to build a new world! (Laughter) Well, that's easy enough now!

KB I think It's like a writing teacher I had once who said 'it's OK if your story has a moral, as long as none of the characters know about it!'

THEORY

EP You both have these interests in many layers of ideas, yet the music is all instrumental. If it weren't for the song titles and if you didn't read the inserts...

KB That's true. I don't feel people should really have to need to read that. That's all Scott! (Laughter). I guess in some ways I'm really a verbal person, but when it comes to music I can't really put things into words that I can in music. Just because it seems to actually express it in words would seem to trivialise it, like writing a good poem I mean. I have written poetry and it's always maybe too [obscure], beating around the bush and too cryptic. I'm very allergic to too much explaining.

SF I honestly find my records very attractive to listen to, so I don't really think I'm saying you have to know a lot of philosophy to understand these records, or be some sort of intellectual. Although I think everyone should strive to be intellectual in some [capacity], to be smart, because it's better to be smart than not. I don't like anti-intellectualism at all. Nor do I like stuffy, annoying intellectuals! Stupidity, that's the worst. You don't have to hear every record I've made to understand. It's not necessary, one is fine. I think you can still get something out of it. Maybe you can get more out of it if you know all the work, but there's certainly a lot to get out of it on its own.

EP There's no escaping your interest in the work of Guy Debord.

SF. Yes, I found him to be a fascinating character and an excellent writer. I actually think his writing is very humorous. It's so self-centred. I enjoy his style...the content is great. And of course, this makes Guy Debord's ashes turn in the Seine or wherever he is! He's sort of pompous. Leaving a lot of gaps. When I'm writing I write the same way, I don't like explaining things too much. Put down a few things and let the person [reader] make the connections. Because that's how you learn. You never learn when things are just told to you and you just accept them, that's not the way to learn anything at all.

EP Can you summarise some of the main points of interest in Debord's philosophy?

SF The concept he's always associated with is the society of the spectacle, meaning that everything belongs to this same huge world, and unless you realise the totality of this, you're really just spinning your wheels if you're trying to figure out solutions to the world's problems. That's the concept. A lot of people will [interpret this] in a simplistic way - you know, the mass media and all this, but it's really everything. But there's lots of [other] interesting ideas in the [work of the] Situationists, and it wasn't just Debord either, although I think he's certainly the best writer of the bunch. He

always talked about the supercession of art, that you couldn't really do art now because it's just part of the spectacle. Until the spectacle has been recognised and broken, you can't do art. But in fact, he did a lot of art. Films, and I consider writing to be art as much as music or films.

THE SWILL RADIO RECORD LABEL

EP What are the practical difficulties in running your own record label?

SF I suppose there wouldn't be practical difficulties if I sold some records so that I could make the money back, but distribution seems to be getting harder and harder to find. That's a world-wide problem. At one time I thought that one of the things was gonna be that no-one would buy vinyl any more, but that isn't the case at all. But distribution's hard. It's so much work that, to me, isn't art. I'm a terrible businessman. And I'm not an oily seller character in any way at all, so I'm just not very good at running a record label. And the real problem is the money, because there just never is any, so it's basically how long is it gonna take [to get a release out], that's why there hasn't been a release for so many [years]. But now we have *I'm Some Songs* and *Stranded* coming out, which is nice.

EP Who else has been on the Swill Radio label?

SF We did a Kjetil Brandsal LP. He's Norwegian. A very nice record. He's Noxagt, he had a number of projects. There was a time when I wanted to branch the label out and start doing a lot of other people's work. It seemed like this is probably a good way to get the label [noticed]. We started a series of Ralf Wehowsky reissues of cassettes, and of course unfortunately the money just hasn't really been there so now the third volume's been passed off to another label. I'd really rather run the label than run the distribution, but it didn't really pan out. So there will be another Tart double LP, and I don't think there'll be another Shadow Ring LP, and maybe another Idea Fire Company, I'm hoping to do some recording this summer. Personally, as long as I can have control over what the packaging looks like, I'd much rather have someone else put out the record. I'd be much happier, not having to deal with the business side of it in any way, shape or form.

EP But don't you find running a label gives you a certain control and creative independence?

SF I speak harshly of running the label, but actually I do like it. And one of the things I've really enjoyed is I've met lots of very nice people, through the post and stuff. This is another great thing about being involved in music, because I've met so many that it makes it very worthwhile. All the good friends I have, almost, I've met through music, or art or writing. So I find that to be a very good thing – bringing like-minded people together. And I'm also very big on dialogue. I just think that's the way to learn more about your own position, by having discussions with people. I love that sort of thing. At the same time I've never felt really part of any sort of scene, or a community outside of my own. Perhaps that's one of the reasons the records don't sell so well. I don't really think there's a bin that's current that you could throw any of my records into and say it's that. Drone music, trance music, hip-hop or whatever it is. I think it's a strength, but sales-wise I suppose it's a difficulty.

EP At one stage you would only work in vinyl and tape issues.

SF Yes, once. I would do a CD now. The Pickle Factory came out on both vinyl and CD, that seemed like a disaster. I would do one on the label if there was a project that seemed like it needed a CD. I used to be fairly anti-CD, as some people might know, but I'm not so much any more. I still think records [sound better]. I think they learned to make CDs sound very good now, but still – CD covers will never be album covers. I like [album covers] as an art object.

EP Some thought does go into your packaging.

SF Karla's done most of the covers and she's very good at it really. We've put a lot of thought into all the material [processes]. It's easier to do that when you don't have a release coming out every month. Of course you can't spend as much time with the packaging, and with the material.

KB I've had drawing classes, and I was OK at it, but because of my problem of not practising I think drawing real things is

something that takes a long time for me. So I tend to do more abstract patterns. Probably what I should do is design fabric or wallpaper, just repeated designs! I don't know how I got into doing [the covers]. I did do a newsletter for work, so I fell into doing the graphic design-y sort of thing. Layouts I probably learned from doing that newsletter. I learned about PageMaker and different things. Partly because I was the computer person in the family. The very first IFCO record, I had a friend help me, but I just learned about it perforce. You get the dimensions from the people who are gonna make the cover. I just lay out different things and started doing more and more with the graphics. It's all based on instinct. Just muttering along and figuring it out. [Choosing] colours that appeal to me. The idea for the front of the Anti-Naturals cover, that was Scott's idea, the purple one. Then I did the back with the repeated mirror-image photographs. I just fell into it. The Ralf Wehowsky ones, I did those. Those are all weird things based on his initials. It has that fake Mondrian [feeling], the colours are like Mondrian. I don't know if they're any good or not, but there you have it.

IS ANYONE STILL LISTENING

EP Over 20 years, do you feel the audience or market for your music has receded?

SF It's hard for me to say, but I would say possibly not. It might be about the same. There are still people who like good music, but I think in the late 1970s and early 1980s, at least from a personal standpoint, there was a lot more optimism that things were [improving]. I was very attracted to the post-punk movement, especially in UK bands. [There was a hope that] things were really turning around and music was really gonna [succeed]. Punk music in general, and more importantly post-punk, where they used lots of things that didn't have anything to do with rock music. Different ways of organising songs, not rock ways of organising songs, and tape techniques...dub was very influential for a lot of these people.

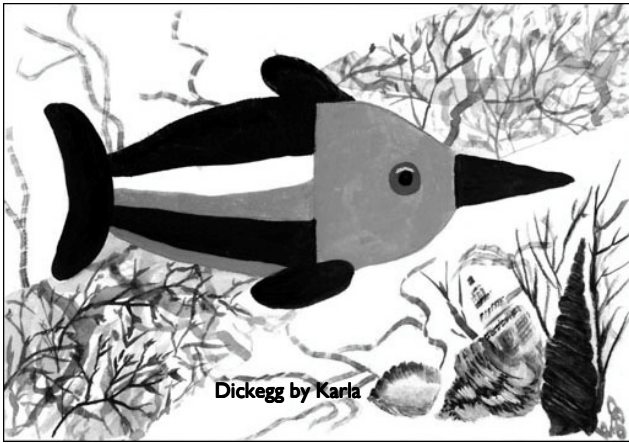


Karla Boreckv

It was a very creative time, very inspiring, made you feel [hopeful]. I'd go to a record shop every week and come back with records that were really fantastic, and you really thought this was gonna go on forever. I thought! And then it all just fell apart, which was very depressing. Another reason I thought it was such an interesting time, people all seemed interested in all sorts of art... when you read interviews with the bands they would always talk about books and movies...and good stuff, not like crap, but good ones! Go-getters, they could turn you onto [new things]. I love to find out about things.

EP Do you also think the music might have influenced other things?

SF Yeah, it seemed like [the whole] culture was gonna be influenced. And I don't think it really was at all. This was one of Debord's things about how everything just gets absorbed, it doesn't really matter [any more]. Like art, everything will get watered down and turned into something it really wasn't, and sold. And that will be the version that everyone actually hears, not the real version. Debord's idea was that even if something revolutionary started to get some attention, it just becomes part of the very thing it hates, right away. Or in fact by definition it is,



because nothing can really be outside of the spectacle. But the optimism was there, it was a very optimistic time. And then I found the mid-80s to be a very depressing time. These things come in cycles. I got very excited in the early 1990s, a lot of the UK underground basement noise music. The Shadow Ring was vaguely associated with that scene. Phil Todd, Betley Welcomes Careful Drivers. I might not have enjoyed all the records, but it really seemed like there was a push, a momentum to get things back to some level where experimental music was interesting again.

KB I think the level of quality, the level of respect from the audience has just gone down. Just because there's so much of it now! So many [musicians] that are moving around without any kind of plan. But that's the way they like it. The people think that to have some kind of discipline, or a plan, or a limit, is bad. It's like this hippy thing! Don't fence me in, you know? To me, you have to have some sort of a boundary, even if it's self-imposed, to work within. When I listen to music, if it has some kind of a rule that your brain can grab onto, even if it's just a broad pattern, is more interesting than just some random set of dots.

EP I don't know if you've heard much contemporary European laptop music, but you're exactly describing it. All these people. They won't learn limits, or disciplines, and they're all about the gadgets which they buy. Laptops, mixing desks, filters, pedals, samples...but where's the ideas?

KB Right, that's the thing, it's just a random mixture. But that's what a lot of people think now. It's not like they have some kind of idea of shaping it, giving it some kind of whatever. I don't really mean like a song structure obviously, but just something. I think they just don't have any interest in that. To me, it doesn't connect. My brain does not connect to that. Sometimes just because it's really loud, [audiences] are into some kind of big extreme experience. I just can't get into it. Even if – again, this is a very un-Anti-Naturals concept, but even if you think about primitive man, why do people like music? Because it goes with your heartbeat. Rhythm, and shaping things, and connecting intellectually. That's to me what is engaging. It's not engaging to me to just have...a blob! But it seems that's what everyone's really into now, [they think] it's really free. (Sigh). I guess it sounds fascist to say they should be disciplined, but I don't even mean discipline like personal discipline. It's been very discouraging.

SF I like to think that my own [music] – and I guess if you compartmentalise my bands you could maybe make that case – but I think that is a really good template of a way to [operate]. Keep a sound, have an identity, but at the same time progress. I think progress is important. I believe in progress! A lot of people don't! All of a sudden you can't progress any more. I think post-modernism, which started out as a very nice critique of modernism, which is always in need of critique, turned into just a reason for everyone to like crap and for everyone not to care. The use value of it seems very very low. And of course that's another thing that perhaps was turned into something it didn't originally start out as.

THE ANTI-NATURALS

EP What can you tell me about the Anti-Naturals? Is there a manifesto, or a philosophy?

SF There is a manifesto, which we included on the first record. I met Dr Tim Shortell, who's now a Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College. He was at the time teaching at Smith, and Karla met him and she immediately thought here's someone who's interested in theory. We hooked up and ended up getting along famously, and having lots of long conversations. That must have been in about 1995 or so. I've always liked the model of an avant-garde organisation, like the Surrealists or the Situationists. Because it brings a lot of people under an umbrella, trying to make your point more clear. So Tim and I and Karla all talked about it, we were the founding members, and I knew Graham then, he's not as interested in theory as I am, but I knew he'd join up. There's really not very many [members], maybe ten people who I would list.

EP It wasn't just theory though, I assume.

SF No, no. Not just theory, theory about art and the way it interacts with the world. [Within the Anti-Naturals cadre] there's music and writing and films, and I like this whole ball of action. This isn't a doctrinaire organisation, where everyone has to believe the same things, at all. It seemed a good way to get a little more attention, get our message out a little better.

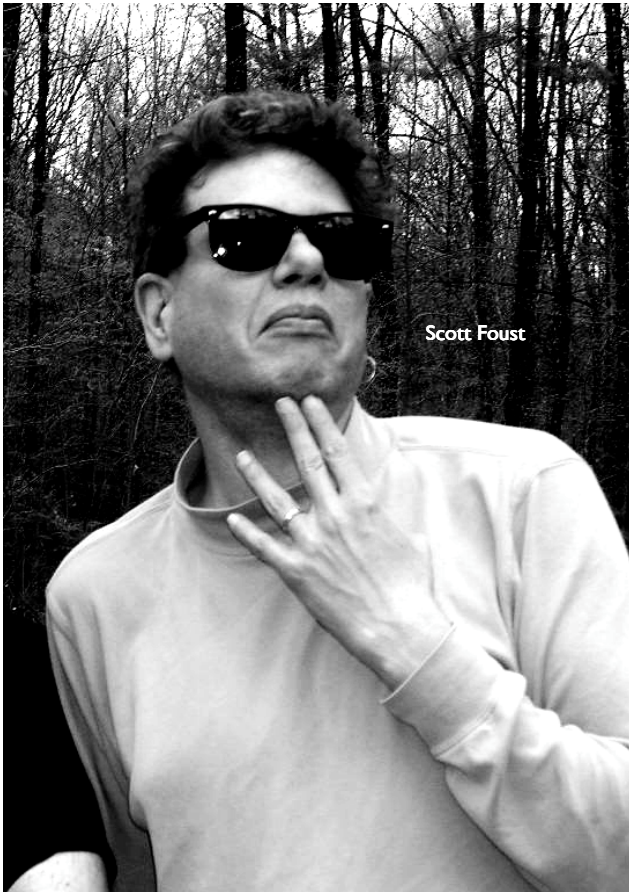
EP There was an element within it, was there not, that everything in a person's life must become aestheticised? So this presumes you expect some kind of action to happen, if Anti-Naturals is to succeed.

SF Yeah, I would expect society to be a much different place. I don't really believe that that *can* happen, but there's no reason I should stop trying. Most people have this weird thing about their personality. That if you think about your personality or try to adjust it, then somehow you're being dishonest. People think with their personalities that there's a real self, and I believe what people consider to be the real self is just all the stuff from the media and their parents and the whole society that's been poured into them, without critically thinking about it. And if you think about your personality and adjust it in certain ways, that you're a phoney. But this isn't right at all, because what you've done then is just accepted the things that society has told you, and how your mind has processed them, and then just accepted this, as 'this is me'.

KB Of course it doesn't mean that it's Anti-Nature. But what it is supposed to mean is that people keep trying to get back to what's natural for them. And they end up getting the impression from the world of advertising that this product is going to make them [into] their true self. And it also partly refers to the fact that people fall back on saying, 'oh that's my nature', or 'that's the nature of man to be cruel'. Well, even if that's true, which I don't think it necessarily is, then we should be able to fight that. I mean, you have a brain, you can [think], you don't have to just [accept].

SF I think you're much better off building your own personality. I really believe that an aesthetic approach, which is part science, and part art and beauty, [means that] you want to make things better all the time. You want to adjust them. And I think you should do that with your personality. I think that you can really improve, or make yourself more interesting. I have to say, I've worked quite hard at it. It's more than just learning. It's critically thinking about almost [everything], even your emotions. People don't want to





Scott Foust

critically think about their emotions.

KB I think sometimes people use [human nature] as an excuse, and sometimes it's used to manipulate people. Now Scott and Tim go further. They talk about the idea that everyone has a 'created personality'. But in some ways even if you're making choices about what sort of aspects you want to have in your personality, that's still based on some kind of experience, or some kind of 'you' that has been formed by your experience. Scott and I, we laugh [about this], because I'm like a soft determinist, as we would say in the traditional philosophical world, whereas he is more of a free will person. I don't know about it, if you're going to go too far with that, then you end up being creepy.

SF One of the things about the Anti-Naturals that I'm really big on is that everything in your life should be critically approached. That's the most [important thing]. You should think about it. Otherwise, what have you done? You're just regurgitating all these things that have been [handed down], and the world will never get better if you keep doing that. It will never become any better. I don't think there's anyone in this world who would not agree that things need to be done, because there's a lot of [problems]. Poverty, the earth is being destroyed slowly...

EP So what you're saying is, let's start the process with ourselves?

SF Yes, because it has to start with you.

EP And you've pinned your faith on art having the power to do this?

SF. Yes, I've pinned my faith on art as a revolutionary force. I think there's a revolutionary force in art, although Debord would say it's been co-opted. It certainly can be, but I think that if you do the work right, there's a kernel in there that can't be. And that kernel is where I pin my hopes! That seed! And maybe in twenty years I'll have a different opinion about that, but for now that's what I think is the way to go.

MUSICAL HISTORY

EP Can you tell us something about the history of bands you've performed in. I know you released a tape compiling work from previous projects.

SF I got interested in music rather late. I don't think I bought any records until I was 15, which would have been 1972. I just wasn't really interested in it, and then one day my brother had bought a K-Tel compilation record, and I heard this Jimi Hendrix song, 'Red House', and I was just fascinated by the guitar sound. So I got interested in his music and music in general pretty quickly. Of course, I never thought I could play any music. It may be hard for people to understand, but at the time music was played by people like rock stars, and they were much more intelligent and adept at everything than you would ever be. And I suppose, although I never really cared for the music, the start of breaking that was the pub rock scene in the UK. Then there was punk rock and all of a sudden it really seemed to open up a world of possibilities, and post-punk opened up even more. All of a sudden, you could be the artist too. You didn't have to be standing there a million miles away watching God play the guitar.

The first band I had was called Y Front, and I played guitar and sang a little, and Mike Popovich played the bass, and Chris Scarpino did synthesizer and some guitar, and Rich Labrie played the drums. We had ideas of possibly doing a record, but you know, creative tensions...so the band split into two, which is where the business actually started. One being The XX Committee which was Chris and I, and the other being Story Of Failure which was Mike and Rich and I. There was a Story Of Failure record, the first Swill Radio release was a single. But The XX Committee, we made a demo tape and sent it out to a couple of magazines, and this label in San Francisco, the guy who ran a magazine called ARPH wrote back and said they'll put this out as a tape. So we had the very first release on their label which was *The XX Committee Steel Negro Music*. So Chris and I started sending around demo tapes to record labels. The first call we got was from Charles Ball who ran Lust On Lust. A New York No Wave sort of label. And he was very enthusiastic about it. And we sent one to Subterranean Records which was a San Francisco-based organisation, and by luck, the guy who ran the label was listening to the tape, and John Bouchard who ran Thermidor Records was walking by the room and heard it. John got in touch... Chris and I thought, 'well, this is easy!' We just sent out a demo tape, and the next thing, that record came out in 1983.

Chris was of the mind that, now we had this record out things were really gonna change. Of course, we didn't really play any shows, and he got very disgusted with the whole music business in general. I drifted about for a while, did the Story Of Failure stuff, then I got together with a guy named [Rick Vrabel]. He made very odd music done with home-made instruments, and it was very interesting. And I said we should record together some time. He had a commercial studio but it just wasn't making money, so he was closing it down, so we got together and formed the band Anschluss. We did a couple of tapes and one record. That was the first band I started taking improvisations and collaging them together and editing them.

After a while it was becoming less and less satisfying to me because Rick Vrabel – the more music he played, the more he wanted to learn how to actually play music, so he taught himself how to sight-read, and [learned] to play a lot of songs, and it was really a bad idea. Some people can do that, I mean Karla sight-reads quite well and she's very talented. But Rick started to play really hokey stuff all the time. Patterns...you know, we'd be playing away and all of a sudden I recognise a Cyndi Lauper chord progression. Oh! So it sort of fell apart.

KB We did have a band where we had lyrics. The Red Disk. It was more of a traditional rock band. One of the songs was in French because I loved French. Also we had a song where I recited slogans, those slogans that people spray-painted during the '68 uprising, like 'sous le pave, le plage'. I remember when I read the stuff, I read it like an announcement at an airport. (Laughs) I would just repeat it several times! But in a generic pleasant voice! So we actually had proper songs and I sang. [This happened] maybe about nine years ago. Our friend Greg was the drummer and he committed suicide unfortunately. When we were recording that stuff, he was going downhill and drinking a lot of Pernod. He had that very boozy liquorice smell. Ooof! I also remember the Oklahoma City bombing happened, and Greg was totally oblivious to it because he was caught in his own difficulties.

That was one of my first times since I had gotten into that different sort of mode that we actually wrote songs together. Mike and I, that's the guy we're in The Pickle Factory with, we connect a lot on a lot of things, and we were left to the rhythm section. There was one time when we had figured out this song, it had a slightly complicated break. And Greg wasn't really interested in rhythm, and in repetition. You'd think most drummers would be. No, he wanted to do drum painting! That's what he called it. He was really into amorphous, making sounds with drums. Mike and I tried to explain how this break was gonna happen. We'd say 'remember this part, and then there's this,'. And Greg would say OK. Then he'd play it, and he wouldn't get it. So for half an hour we're beating our heads against [a brick wall]...(laughter)...he just didn't get it!

SF So that's how the Pickle Factory was born. Karla, Mike and I all played really well together right away. Mike and I had been collaborating for a while, and he always said he would never play without a drummer. But when he did, he loved it! We recorded *Our Pledge*, and when that came out in 1994, we really thought it would do well. *Our Pledge* had a lot of Krautrock elements - along with touches of Eno and Dome, and that was right around the time when Krautrock was starting to be big again. But it was a sales disaster. We recorded a follow-up, *Our Name Means Excitement*, which I'll release somehow, as it is excellent.

HERE'S TO LOVE FILM

EP So, you've also made a film! How long has it taken you?

SF Two and half years! It's called *Here's To Love!* The shooting took about six months, and then the editing's been about two years, and I'm just about finished with it now.

EP It hasn't come out of nowhere, has it? You have a history, collaborators...

SF That's right, Tim has made a bunch of films, and Tim and Graham have done some excellent short films together. And I did one called *Right Now*, and Tim and Karla and I worked on another one, the Manifesto of the Anti-Naturals, which was basically just the manifesto read with subtitles. The only equipment [we have] is really an 8mm video camera. I'd been thinking about doing a long film. [It] was a really interesting idea, in the sense that there is no way I should actually really be able to make one. I like challenges like that! I came up with a workable scheme. And I had met Matt Krefting in 1999. Through him I met Jessi Swenson and Meara O'Reilly. They seemed perfect for what I wanted. They weren't really actors. Meara may have had a bit of acting training. But they really looked good and they understood what I wanted, as they're all very intelligent, so we started shooting the film. It had its disasters, but it didn't go that badly till the end, then I really just spent the last two years editing it. And it's been constant work. I've never worked nearly so hard on anything. And I don't really know that I will again.

EP Why was it so much work?

SF Because, one thing is I don't like the way video looks that



much. A lot of the work was in the shooting, because [in post-production] I haven't really done much digital manipulation, other than slowing things down, and the editing. It was just hard to get the film to look the way I wanted it to. To make it say what I wanted it to. It just took time. There was a long scene and a lot of technical difficulties, but mostly it was just watching the footage over and over, making a whole lot of notes, and I was probably sitting in front of the computer for four hours a day. One of those years was spent just watching the footage constantly. Trying to figure out how to knit it together, to get what I wanted out of it.

EP And the soundtrack is mostly music by your bands...

SF Yeah, there's some unreleased music and there's a little bit of sound work, a brief bit of narration, but the rest of the movie is just music. But it's not an abstract film. There's people and a story in it. Not really any acting for the most part. Most of the action is represented by poses. And this is nothing against Matt or Jessi or Meara but when you don't have actors, don't have them act! And acting isn't some mystical thing, but it is still something you have to know how to do. And I didn't really want acting anyway. I decided it wasn't something I wanted at all.

EP Karla, what has been your contribution?

KB I did some of cinematography, and I did the scenes when Scott was here in the house. He would tell me what he wanted to capture and I would do it in my way. So it was a good collaborative thing. There were specific shots he wanted, like he needed a shot of the Fall 7" or whatever, but if I saw something that looked visually interesting, I would say do that again, because I could see that it looked good. He had this method which he came up with, where we would film from too far away so it goes in and out of focus. Over some of the technical things, Scott and I almost got a divorce several times! He thought I knew about computers, so I would know about this [editing] program. But it's a really complicated program. It's Final Cut Pro. Sometimes we'd have some little crisis right before we went to bed, where [a shot had changed]. 'This looks different now!' Well, the program had in its infinite wisdom decided things should be done this way since you're doing this, and he's freaking out! But really, it was nice, because Scott gives me a chance to do graphic things that ordinarily I wouldn't get a chance to.

EP The story of the film seems to be a kind of modernist fable...

SF It's sort of a romantic journey. The story concerns the head of an avant-garde art organisation, played by me, who's been forgotten by society, abandoned by his friends and left alone. And Matt and Jessi and Meara play three beautiful young people who have been inspired by my work. And then they come and find me and rescue me, and then there's a party, and an exciting denouement, which I won't reveal! (Laughter) You'll have to see the film! It's so exciting! But it's not a very complicated story. The scenes are all fairly long. I wouldn't say it's fast-moving or anything. But I'm really happy with what it came out to be.

EP It's probably a bit early to tell, but do you have any sense of how this film fits into your overall pattern of ideas?

SF I kind of look at this as my big work that ties together a lot of the ideas I have. A film, I like to think, makes some of these ideas a little more clear than perhaps they are from just records.

EP How would it make things clearer?

SF Maybe it makes the music a little bit more easy to understand, just because it gives people a hold they can get on it, and I think maybe it makes the ideas I have about the world maybe easier to understand as well. On the other hand, it becomes very very difficult when you work on something for so long to be able to see it quite as clearly as maybe you would like. We have old records and there's a track that really bothers you and annoys me. So I really make it a case to try and go through and make sure there isn't anything that, ten years down the line, I'm going to find really offensive. I think actually it's sort of a neat way to work, because I don't want to embarrass myself later.

EP You want to employ the same critical faculty and quality control to this film, as you do with the records...

SF Very much. Certainly working in a different medium, but it's very much the way I put together an IFCO record.

EP Did you study any kind of film-making technique?

SF No, I don't know how to make a film at all. And I think that in some ways that's a little bit worked to my advantage. I've watched a lot of films. But I don't know anything about how to make one. Well, I do now! (Laughs)

IN SUMMARY

EP Is there anything else I can ask you about?

KB Nobody ever talks to me, so I've got a lot built up in me. I would be offended if I thought people were ignoring me because I was just the girl or something. That would offend me. But by the same token I don't think I should get attention because I'm a woman. I just want attention because I'm good at what I do! I think I'm more and more engaged in what we're doing, and I think it's very engaging. It's not perfect, but...I guess we'll just keep plodding on anyway and hope that someday somebody gets it, or likes it. There must be somebody. A few people like it!

SF I say this all the time, but I really think it's important for people who make records to listen to their own music a lot. I think a lot of people make it, then move on...they say 'I don't want to hear that again!' You should have to hear it again. They should listen to their own records, because that's the way you learn about what you've done right and what you've done wrong.

EP So, I would hope that you regard each new release of your own as an improvement on previous works...



Photo by Scott Foust. From Timothy Shortell's film, *The Terrible Comet Salt*

SF Oh, an attempt at it, anyway! But I was very happy with the *Anti-Natural* LP, that's why I didn't do another one for [a long time]. You know, Karla and I did a lot of recording for a follow-up, but it just seemed like it was gonna be the same record, and I just didn't want to make the same record again. I try to move on, move ahead. □

Some records (and a film)...

IFCO

Idea Fire Company started off with a double LP, whose title *Explosion In A Shingle Factory* refers to the reception given to a Marcel Duchamp painting by the mob. It sets the agenda for the mix of improvisation and collage techniques. At most successful, the musical passages are suspended in a perfect framework of airy and spacey field recordings. At very worst, you may get passages of droney sludge, but they're unlike any other you may have heard. The couple built on the lessons learned and made a second double LP, *The Fourth Dimension is Money*, expanding the line-up with friends and family to form temporary, fictitious groups. For this listener, this is one of the most successful LPs, with a good 50-50 split of beautiful organ continuum music with the more menacing collage pieces. Only the Guy Debord lecture piece mars listening enjoyment. The third LP, *Anti-Naturals*, sees an almost clean break with conventional beauty and a sharp turn towards difficult, impenetrable textures, almost purely made by alien-sounding synths.

This harsh LP almost negates the achievements of its predecessors; this strategy reflects Foust's fear of repeating himself. That said, it's a real grower that repays close listening. Fourth IFCO LP, *Stranded*, incorporates the slightly younger team of O'Reilly and Swinson.

Tart

Tart, which started performing around 1999, are the core duo of IFCO with addition of Graham Lambkin. Amazingly, the music which results is almost completely different, clearly pulling in several directions and venturing into sonic territory which IFCO normally leave alone. Both Tart LPs to date make for rather uncomfortable listening. *Radio Orange* was edgy enough, but the 2nd LP *Bring In The Admiral* is positively steeped in intelligent, wiry paranoia. The oscillating mesmerism of Borecky is still there, but thrown off-centre by Lambkin's baleful influence.

The Pickle Factory

The Pickle Factory are the label's pop band in comparison with the determined experimentation of above LPs. With help of Popovich and a drum machine, a warped version of UK post-punk emerges, swallowing whole influences from The Pop Group, This Heat, Gang Of Four, The Fall and hosts of others; an all-instrumental LP and in places even quite danceable. One LP to date, *Our Pledge*, whose enjoyable contents are belied by its severe minimalist packaging; the front cover is an arty photo of a pipe on a wall (also used in a Foust film). Also released on CD in a card package as a resentful stab against jewel cases.

The New Peculiars

The New Peculiars – a conceptual joke on paper, sounds fantastic on record. Lively insane noise that you can use to clean out the corners of your house while simultaneously raising the roof. Borecky's fairly eccentric parents are the stars. Three raucous singles released to date.

Early work

Foust's recorded pre-history is becoming slightly 'collectible', probably due to age of records rather than anything to do with their musical quality. The XX Committee LP was offered by our friend Stefan for a hefty whack. The Anschluss LP was an early Swill Radio release. A compilation tape on Foust's Pineapple Tapes is called *The Fighting Sensualist* and includes samples of music from just about every stage of his so-called career, with more detailed notes than you could possibly need.

Here's To Love!

This feature-length video work has occupied Foust's every waking moment for the last 2 years. It's a very strong statement. It concentrates on saying one thing at a time; each micro-episode in the story is told through emphasising and repeating the main actions over and over, much like Stan Brakhage does in *Dog Star Man*. While we're making comparisons, the gin-drinking scenes (which resemble a polite orgy) are strongly reminiscent of the drug scenes from *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. There's the same 'rush' to the imagery as the protagonists in the film get higher and higher. Foust has seen neither of these important films – he remains avowedly ignorant of most avant-garde cinema in fact. Apart from some minimal voice-over at the beginning, the film is mostly free from dialogue or speech, and remains a sequence of lush images counterposed with IFCO music. Mostly, it's the 'difficult' synth-looping material from *Anti-Natural*, which creates a near-insufferable effect at times, but does the job of drawing you into the images.

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