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Interview of Jon Hopkins: Violently Beautiful

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Pierro: Do you always play in such a violent, noisy way?

Yeah! (*laughs*) I think the live and the album are different things. You know, when you're in studio, recording, you're in your own head. But when you go out and play, you've got to have those beats in there, you've got to have the emotion, you've got to give some energy. I love the idea of starting really low and just building, and building, and building; and by the end, just like fucking everything thrown.

Dr. Javnaire: I saw at the beginning of the show searching and hesitating. Is there a big place for improvisation in your work?

Yeah, there's a lot of improvisation. I like to feel the show, that there're recurring ideas. And then, it starts quiet, and progressively coming to the rhythm. And from then, you can bring the beat in.

Pierro: I'm impressed by the way you're sculpting the sound. How do you manage to have such virtuosity?

I don't know! (*laughs*) It's just time and practice, and a profound love to what I do. I've done a lot of shows, and... If you just saw me play two years ago, it was completely different, it was rubbish. It takes a long time, and I just really give shows since two years, since this third album.

Pierro: And by the way, between your first album (*Opalescent*) and that, you went from something more contemplative to a really violent music. Where does that violence come from?

I was eighteen or nineteen when I wrote *Opalescent*, I wanted to do a kind of gentle escapist album. I was searching my style. But then I was exposed to a lot more energy in music. And even if it is quite violent, I still think it's positive. It's not dark, it's happy. To make people dance is the thing.

Dr. Javnaire: Does electro music remind you playing classical piano? (*From the age of 12 to 17, he was in the Royal College of Music in London*)

Yeah, because piano taught me to use figure skills and now, with these pads, I can reproduce that.

Dr. Javnaire: But does classical music still inspire you?

No, not really, it never actually was. I did enjoy playing classical piano, but I did stop when I was 17. I think movies and soundtracks inspire me more than classical music. And the beat come more from club culture.

Pierro: And are these pads an innovation, are they very recent?

No, no, there has been three different generations and this is the newest one. But, it's just how you use them. You can use them in such different ways. You can do anything!

Pierro: And what is the function of each pad?

Oh, you know, they all have literally hundreds of functions. But me, on the far left, I have a certain type of filter for the beat, I have one middle which loops, and I have one on the right which degrees the sound and bass. You have samples on the bottom (bass, drums, etc.). And Ableton runs into the pad, the pad records and then you can sample back.

Dr. Javnaire: The title *Insides* of your album let's imagine that your creations are very personal. What is the place of introspection in your music?

It's not introspection so much. It's me trying to represent things that have happened, feelings I had. That album is about a lot of things such the time I was in a music festival, Big Chill, in England which was set in the countryside and I had set there. It was kind of a crazy night. And I had the incredible experience of playing piano outside as the sun came up. And I saw this girl in the distance, she was in a farm. She heard the piano and came next to me. And it was one of the most beautiful girls I've ever seen. That's what the album is all about: this kind of progression from gentle to dirty raving which then fall as the sun rise with this piano piece at the end. That's what *Insides* is all about.

Dr. Javnaire: We've also felt that there's an important part of travelling in your music (in Wire for example). Is that right or not?

I think this is the thing I love about electronic music: it works with travelling so well. When I am on a train, I love going through the landscape with electronic music. It's like your thoughts... it's so cool. And, you know, when I write, I'm not thinking. Things just happen. And as I travel a lot, I have ideas when I'm travelling.

But, this album was written before I did have travelling a lot. Everything has happen kind of since it came out. The touring only started after that. So, I think the next one, on which I'm starting to work, will be influenced by all those trips.

Pierro: You played tonight some new very rough material. Will your new album look like that?

There is really heavy beat during the live. But this is not necessarily new album tracks. Some of them are, but there are often just things I've written to play live. But the next album is going to be more of a hard beat thing.

Pierro: It's interesting because *Opalescent* was very quiet, *Contact Note* medium and now *Insides* which has four or five tracks very rough, violent but with a very beautiful harmony...

Well, I like the things they are in *Insides*, when it goes crazy and then it calms down. I think I want to do that again.

Pierro: Wayne McGregor used your music to set a dance show called *Entity* (in 2008) and you composed music with Tunng for Christopher Kelly to be projected at the London fashion week. Do you always think when you create music of a special link between your compositions and the very organic material of human body?

Yeah, in some sense. Wayne McGregor's thing, *Random Dance*, was actually kind of a commission. So, a lot of the tracks of the album I chose responded to what I wanted to see danced by the best dancers on earth. Because, you know, it's an amazing show, I love it. They're incredible people these dancers, they're all really strange. And, in fact, I wrote it without really meeting them. I just saw Wayne at the beginning. And then, right at the end, I just came in and saw what they've done to it. They all do some incredible movements, and seeing people dance on your music is magical.

But to do this track with Tunng was a good excuse to do something I have never done.

Dr. Javnaire: You did a lot of collaborations with for example Brian Eno. Could you tell us a bit more about your relation with him? We know he considers you as a talented young man...

He's basically been responsible for my changing, helping me a lot. Plus we have this new album coming out in few weeks (*Small Craft On A Milk Sea*), which is really exciting. All these improvisations I did with him and Leo Abrahams, another guitarist, friend of us, were fantastic. And he supported me so much over the years. He just changed my life a lot. It's amazing that we're now going to release this album together and that people can hear some of the stuff that we worked over the years. It's quite exciting.

Dr. Javnaire: Do you consider him as a friend?

Yeah, (*laughs*) it's been now seven years I meet him, so...

Pierro: You also collaborated with David Holmes...

...Yeah, yeah, he's a good friend actually! And I know him better than Brian...

Pierro: ...Did it encourage you to make the soundtrack of *Monsters*, Gareth Edwards' movie? (*David Holmes is notably known to have composed soundtracks for movies such as Ocean's Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen*)

Well, I've always wanted to do soundtracks. I don't want to do only that, but I've always been interested in doing that. If a film comes along and I believe it would be very good, I'm ready to start such a project. But now the thing that actually got me that job was Brian again. He realized the *Lovely Bones* soundtrack for Peter Jackson. Brian was the main

composer and then and Leo Abrahams and I were again kind of sub-composers. And because I did that, the company trusted me to do *Monsters*' soundtrack.

Dr. Javnaire: Have you ever played in France before tonight?

Yes. I've done a few. The first time was "Social Club" in Paris with Tim Exile, who is friend of mine. And then I did one at the "Nemo" festival in Paris, and finally the "3 Elephants" in Laval. So, tonight's the fourth one.

Dr. Javnaire: And what do you think about France and the French audience?

Well, "Social Club" was not a good show, I didn't enjoy so much. It was not my favourite one. But it was my first time there, and people didn't know the songs, and... I think that the audience there wanted a full beat dance. And then the "Nemo" festival I played with Kode9 and Tim Exile, and a lot of people, was very good.

Pierro: And do some of your collaborations (such as this one with Kode9) are factors of the evolution of your sound, towards something rougher?

Yeah! It is, definitely! But more with Tim I think, because he does have a lot more influence on me. The way he behaves on a stage really impress me. So, I love the way you can hear ideas from him in my music. Moreover now, because we live near each other in London. And we have the will to collaborate in the future.

But also, my live agent works with a lot of Warp Records' peoples, like Fuck Buttons.

Pierro: So, could we say you're like a group of contemporary artists, with also Four Tet?

Yeah! I think so. And I made one remix of his song recently...

Pierro: And Nathan Fake, also?

Yeah, yeah... he's a good friend as well, a really nice guy.

Pierro: It's like you're friend with my entire iTunes library!!! (*long and strong laughs, of course*)

But, what is funny with Four Tet is that I was big fan for years and that now we're friends and we're go touring, mixing together.

With Nathan as well we only met a few months ago in Montreal at the Mutek Festival which is one of the best shows I had, really, really fun. We just met then. He's only done a remix for me at that point, but we definitely want to do stuff together in the future.

Dr. Javnaire: Maybe a tougher question, but could you please try to describe us your music?

Well, what I see is a combination between emotion, euphoria and energy. That's the life I see on the records. But, it is more the way I want it. I don't know how it is, but I want it to be beautiful and at the same time make people dance.

Pierro: What do you think about the expression “violently beautiful”?

Yeah! It’s exactly the way. That’s very much a good way of describing it. That’s how I would like it to be seen.

Pierro: Maybe a last question. On the track “Colour Eye” we can here the rain falling. Do you use those kinds of effects very often?

Well, my studio is quite in centre London and I just put some microphones at the window. When you have electronic music all the sound is totally electronic, there is no place for anything else. Now I like combining what I make on the keyboards and computers with sounds I might be hearing myself, coming from behind me, at the windows. I want people’s ears listen to it and hear what I’m hearing. I love the rain, the sound of rain. It comes like static on a violent record. Like at the end of the album, if you listen to the track “Autumn Hill”, on the last piano piece, you can here bus, because that morning when I was at this festival I talked about earlier, surrounded by birds and trees, it was the last thing I heard before falling asleep.

Nao (*who was here since the beginning, waiting for the last question*): I’m studying philosophy and I just want to know if you have an opinion about “sincerity”, just that word. Do you have something to say about this word?

Sincerity? Yes, well, I do! It’s an important thing. What I don’t like is when you can hear in music people trying to guide things rude, almost try to change. It only works in art when it is from the heart. And I don’t want things that are only of the newest genre. I just do what I do...

Pierro: And that may be why your show didn’t match with “Social Club”.

(laughs) Yeah! In fact, when I think of this place, I don’t think of sincerity too much. But, you know, if you stay honest to your ideas and you don’t exhibit yourself, I think you can deal with sincerity.