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Clockwise from top left: Claus Bøje, Christer Irgens-Møller, Lotte Anker, Peter Friis Nielsen, P.O. Jørgens, Steffen Poulsen, Torben Ulrich.

Torben Ulrich in CLINCH

dice,
done



Dice, Done

An interview/conversation

between Claus Bøje, Torben Ulrich and Molly Martin

Molly: Even before we get to the music, going inside to the CD, there are already a few things on the album cover which we could address for a moment: words like Dice or Humlebæk or Clinch. Maybe we could begin with hearing where the name Clinch comes from, Claus, in a historical sense, but maybe also more metaphorically?

Claus: I think it would be right to say that Clinch fundamentally has been built up around what Peter and I have been doing since we began playing together, toward the end of the 1960s. First we played in a trio called Coronarias Dans, then we continued in a group called Four Avantis, then Christer joined with us to become Clinch, and we made that record called "fri frei libre"...

Molly: But then as I understand it, wasn't there also a Clinch program in the Danish Radio?

Claus: Yes, you could say that from the starting point "Clinch" was the combination of different expressions. It was a label I tried to put on the music, and at the same time it was a weekly column in the daily newspaper Information, about political issues in the field of sports, and then the third thing was the Clinch radio program that I had going since 1975.

"Clinch" stems from the boxing vocabulary, and it's still a pretty good expression, pointing to that situation where two boxers are very tight and are holding each other close to get in all these small blows. And if two boxers are in a clinch too long, the referee says "break". So the heat and the rhythm and the fight, and the warmth and the blood and all the senses being so close and into the action – to me that was a very nice expression of what should be going on in debate and interviewing, and in music, or whatever.

Torben: Yeah, there's also that aspect to "clinch" where the holding gives you a sense of the pulses slowing down, the rhythm of the steps themselves slowing down, almost a breathing room; a holding, but a holding where the tension remains, a kind of interlocking, and then as you mention, Claus, the break, a clearing, a distance, a renewed space, a moment of renewal where another series of moves begins, maybe in a different key, another rhythm ...

And wasn't that what we were tempted or attempting to try, when we first talked about what a meeting in actual music perhaps could be, since we had shared for so many years the radio, the running, the writing, the Gerlev seminars, the ball playing?

Claus: Yes, because what brought us together, here in the field of music, was the idea to go further with Clinch, in the sense of trying to bring the fields of jazz and sports together, within an actual music group. Which maybe wasn't such a normal way to think or proceed, but of course it came out of the fact that my main interest has been in the world of sports, and that was also our meeting point, you and I, as you say. So it seemed an obvious possibility for you to come into this setting with poetry rendered in various ways into the flow of musical improvisations of Clinch. Because, in a way, we had always been in clinch with each other, in those different fields, even in music – but it was the first time that we could actually do things together, practise together, because when I first got to know you in the '60s, I had heard that you were starting to look more into the tenor saxophone. But it was too late to ever play with you, because you had actually stopped. But we never stopped communicating about our mutual interests in how to develop the language of that kind of music and to discuss where some new impulses might be coming from. And we still had those talks and that kind of curiosity: Are they on the right track, in terms of the elements that we both felt were vital to the music, and the things that were not to be compromised...

Molly: But Clinch had already had some experience in the field of reading of text alongside the musical sphere, right?

Claus: Yes, in a way it's an old story, spanning quite a stretch of time. We even played at the Roskilde Festival in one of those "jazz & poetry" things. And then those experiences triggered some of the stuff that we have done lately, also with the touring and all that.

Maybe this whole area can be seen in a kind of three-fold way. First, most of what is done,

if we simplify, takes place with, say, three musicians accompanying a man reading a text. Secondly, you have the situation where those presenting a text actually have their roots in the music in some way. But the ultimate, the third level, would be to cooperate with a poet who had the experience of being an improviser or jazz musician, and where the music or the musical or even instrumental rendering, as a whole, would be a priority.

In my opinion the collaboration with Torben goes directly to the third level. The other thing was the vitality of the texts, which was in the field of physical experience, expressing yourself standing on the ground of physical expression, where the music and the sports thing converge, which means that you in a way go directly to two areas where the vitality-origin is from the same source.

Whereas most "jazz & poetry" could be about whatever – something missing, a flower, a love – the content of Torben's texts points directly to the play, the ball, action, movement; that is exactly what we do in the music, a high degree of improvisation, but in a very well-known pattern: When the ball comes, that is when the music is played; and with the impulse of the music coming from both Peter and Christer, in a way the vitality was so easy to see. Because when we got those texts that you have put on your paintings, it seemed obvious that they should also be spoken out in that intensity of the music ...

So again, I think it's very important to point out that these areas are very close in their fundamental construction. Playing the ball, whatever happens, could happen playing our music. Therefore to see or to hear how we could get a maximum of richness in our expression meeting the situation, meeting the ball, meeting the sound of the other ...

Molly: In terms of a sort of collective chronology, over the years, Claus, have you played a lot with Lotte?

Claus: No, it was actually Christer who started working with Lotte back in 1990. He picked her as the saxophone player on his record "The Garden Is". It was Hasse Poulsen who brought Lotte and Peter together in a trio, Anker-Friis-Poulsen, that existed in the late '90s. She joined Clinch in the autumn of 2003, and with her high degree of speed in these combinations of small strokes, she fits so well into the way we play the patterns of that kind of music. One of the focal points is a repetition of phrases, that are both consequent in their

keeping the line and renewing, so that you listen. And she has a great sense of keeping and giving back a kind of tension. A lot of saxophone players, they play phrases and they ride on top of your energy, but she gives just as much back, and that's a precious quality ...

Torben: Yeah, she doesn't ride the rhythm, she adds, puts herself in different places. To me that's also one of the qualities of the group as a whole, like with Peter you guys create a kind of space of dynamics and tensions rather than ride some kind of pulse, even if it were a kind of free pulse: thus generating a multiplicity of pulses in a free setting, shifting, simmering ...

Molly: So, maybe now we should go more into the details of how the recording itself was approached, the more so since there was that band meeting, where among other things some of the texts that had been used when you guys were touring – usually projected on whatever screen or background was available above the band on stage – came under discussion. While it was felt that names like Billie Holiday or Thelonious Monk easily could be an inspiration, the view was also expressed that, in a more intimate setting, with only the words heard (and not seen), they could be a certain obstacle to the unfolding of the music. It was likewise mentioned that there were certain words – like the word “repetition” – that didn't sound so interesting being repeated in a sampling setting. So Claus suggested that we might take the texts to Seattle and work with them and underline some parts that would be less loaded, from these two perspectives. On that basis, we made two sets of what we called “distillations”. But then Torben sat down and sort of re-worked or played with those distillations.

Torben: Well, basically we had twelve texts – we call them Lines, and you can see them written out here, three to a page – and most of these we had already used on the tour, as mentioned, not necessarily at the same time. So I thought it could be nice to make twelve new ones, based only on the words of the distillations – and none other.

When we underlined the words, we had had used two pens or markers, first a pink one, and for the next set a blue one. So I thought first to make four new Lines out of the pink-colored words, and four more out of the blue-colored, and another four that would use a combination of the two colors.

So now we had twelve old texts, where the meaning was familiar, growing out of the inter-

play between music and ball play. And we had twelve new ones, where the semantic would be different, although the words were entirely part of the first set of twelves. And hopefully a resonance would be established, a connective thread, like chord and melody line in the history of that music.

Still with Holiday and Monk in mind, we may think of how the bop-generation would use the chords familiar to the swing generation and put new lines on top of well-known chordal progressions, with some minor fifths and ninths added. And how a still-later generation would break up the chordal and linear patterns and begin to ignore the formal requirements of eight- and twelve-bar thinking, even before the pulse itself was beginning to be, as was said, freed up.

What we tried in Humlebæk, as we had done at the tour dates, was to try also to improvise both up and down individual texts as well as across: from one to any other one.

Claus: But we should also mention the process of dicing, the use of dice to set up the instruments or the players on the different tracks. That was your idea, because we had talked about not necessarily playing "tutti" all through the numbers, to combine voice and different instrumentations along the way ...

Torben: Well, I thought Christer set up a nice chart there. The idea was that when we arrived we wouldn't sort of "decide" who would play or participate in the next piece of music. So Christer quickly just wrote it down on a sheet of paper which combinations would come forth on the next piece, according to how the dice rolled.

So that's also how the title of the whole thing came about. And once that was agreed on, or even before, for me it resonated with the title and central line of Mallarmé's poem from 1895 "Un coup de dés", where it says "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard", which has been translated "Dice Thrown Never Will Annul Chance" or "A throw of the dice will never abolish chance".

After the entire output of the two afternoons, Friday's and Saturday's, had been heard by everyone and edited down to a CD format, by taking out individual tracks a certain chronological order remained, which stayed intact except for being placed, book-end style, within

two versions of Friday's very first music. Staying with Mallarmé, I thought it might be nice go to the well-known preface of the poem to look for inspiration, sample-style, for a possible row of titles for the individual tracks. Since the word "Preface" was the very first word of the preface and "Source" the very last word, I thought that the other titles should be found in between these two words of Mallarmé's prose text.

Molly: Since there may be people who are not that familiar with Danish geography, it might be right to elaborate a bit on Humlebæk, as it appears in the title. In other words, two days where?

Torben: Yes, if you go north from Copenhagen, on the stretch towards Elsinore, a little while before arriving, there's some very idyllic countryside, you may say typically Danish landscape, slightly wavy, not quite hilly, full of fields, a farmhouse, and then another. And in the middle of all this lives our producer and recording engineer, Peter Ole. And as you may know, Peter Ole has made some very nice music himself. So to have someone with that understanding and that experienced with the music, sitting right there at the mixer, was already a treat and a privilege. But in addition to that, in terms of landscape and hospitality, after turning left off one of the Humlebæk byways, you hit a path up to Renee and Peter Ole's farmhouse, with its barn, a quiet yard, summer roses, a slight breeze. And never will you abolish the idea of just a peaceful afternoon in the heart of this island.

And then, as you enter, after the farmhouse itself, with its triple wings, you walk toward the barn, you think. And you enter, and there it is: another landscape altogether, the hums and hops of technology, a veritable postmodern studio, miles of multicolored cords, shelves of gongs and cymbals, pretty incredible.

The difficulty, then, making these worlds come together. A landscape, a soundscape, expressing where we are, in Humlebæk, and in this world at large. Facing each other, and pre-facing. Two days, improvising, seeing how close we can get to the core of the matter at hand.

– June, 2004, Hvalsø, Denmark

	william parker talks about a tone world where	
		whereas here
when the ball comes	the music "exceeds its own properties"	to play means to remain
re- membering billie holiday's words	when the ball comes	exceedingly open
"the winds of march	to come forward	(and alert)
that made my heart a dancer"	more playful than play	without a tiny preference
		for some outcome
		or another

giving
up
the need
to
prevail

giving
away
the need
to
impress

giving
in
to
the plays
of
play

when
the ball
comes

to
let
it
come

ornette
coleman
tells
how

he
once
had
this
band
from
madagascar

that
played
music
by
breathing
only
through
their
nostrils

when
the ball
comes

to
return
it
through
the nostrils

his
fuller
name
was
said

to
be
thelonious
sphere
monk,
reflecting

the
trinkle
roundness
of
his
dissonant

dance,
sideways
in
ascetic
space

we,
his
followers,
must
now
return

the
ball,
ever

playing
into
the unplayed,
criss-
crossing

his
middle
name

speaking
of
the balinese
theater

artaud
says
he senses
"a state
prior
to
language
and

which
can
choose
its own:
music,
gestures,
movements,
words."

when
the ball
comes

to
return
into
a state

prior
to
play

already,
the throwing
of
dice
implies
a certain
choice

already,
the meaning
of
choice
initiates
a certain
play

john
cage
has
said:
"to
obtain

the
value
of
a sound,
a movement,

measure
from
zero."

when
the ball
comes

nothing,
nothing

to
play

perhaps
as
schoenberg
says
"without
architecture,

an
ever-
changing,
unbroken

succession
of
colors,
rhythms
and
moods."

when
the ball
comes

to
play
without
the frame-
work
of

erection,
victory

speaking
on
reliance

upon
notated
music

lester
young
famously
said:
what're
you
gonna
do

when
the lights
go
out?

in
ball
games,
perhaps
likewise:

to
make
songs
appear

dis-
count
score

bach,
says
bukowski,
"is
the hardest

to
play
badly
because

he
made
so
few
spiritual
mistakes."

ball
comes,
your
turn

1. Preface	2:07
2. Prismatic	7:06
3. Versification	4:04
4. Surrounding Silence	2:54
5. Shortcut	2:15
6. Distribution of Space	3:15
7. And of Dream	5:11
8. Sketch	3:44
9. Add to That *	9:45
10. Without Presuming Anything	3:50
11. Elementary State	2:09
12. Source	1:57

Torben Ulrich: voice, recitation and poetry; alto flute drone on *
 Lotte Anker: soprano & tenor saxophones
 Claus Bøje: drums, trombone drone on *
 Peter Friis Nielsen: electric bass
 Christer Irgens-Møller: DX-7 & VL-1 synthesizers
 Steffen Poulsen: live sampling, sound manipulation
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