



# BENOIT PIOULARD

escalating  
soundlayers

*The sensation of catching snowflakes with your tongue for the first time. The smell of the ocean. That special feeling when you realise your relationship is a million miles away from having a happy end ever. Listening to the music of Portland based Benoit Pioulard (or Thomas Meluch in real life) will most certainly take you back, even though those memories might not be entirely yours at all. It's a general feeling of nostalgia that somehow takes over, regardless of the fact that both of his albums (on Kranky) or his scene-stealing compilation tracks (on Ghostly International) are pretty much state of the art productions. All of his songs - sometimes they're only captured ideas that won't exceed a running time of two minutes - transport these blissful musical moments, layers and layers of weird sounds and field recordings and vocals and all kinds of instruments. Lodown had the chance to talk to passionate photographer and gifted musician Meluch in early January.*

**Even though you have probably answered this question a million times already, I have to ask about your obvious affinity to the French language... why did you choose Benoit Pioulard as the name for your musical alter ego?**

Any affinity for the French language comes from having spoken it throughout much of my life, mostly in school. At a point in my first year of university I was taking several French courses at once, and one night woke up to scribble a couple of things on the notepad by my bed while semi-conscious, one of which was the name Benoit Pioulard... a short time later I was giving a few recordings to someone and decided to tack that name onto it. Most of the French song titles are based on my historical studies of the country, though some are simply expressions that occurred to me in English but sounded better in French.

**You moved from Michigan to Portland... what actually triggered that decision? And would you say that your new surrounding somehow influenced the sound of your second album *Temper*?**

I lived in Michigan from the age of nine months until I moved here at 23 years old. I still have a fondness for the Midwest - it'll always be home - but I took a vacation that brought me to Portland a few

years ago, and was immediately taken with the atmosphere and the omnipresence of natural beauty. Knowing that I'd be graduating from university in the near future, at that point, it quickly became the next step for me. And yes, moving here in the middle of recording the album did have certain effects on the mood(s) of what I was making - not better or worse but different, and I'm very pleased with the variety of influences and consequences that guided the final result.

**You collaborated with New York based musician Praveen for 'Songs Spun Simla'... was that a project you realised in between your own two albums?**

It was an ongoing collaboration from the days of recording *Précis* until early 2008, we would only do a track every so often since we exchanged ideas entirely through email contact, but it ended up nicely coherent, I feel. We're still working at a similar pace, so hopefully there will be another collection at some point in the future.

**Your music could easily be basic singer/songwriter stuff... instead you add layers and layers of noise and field recordings and all kinds of instruments which results in a sound that pretty much plays in a league of its own. I was wondering if that was a conscious decision or if that trademark sound happened accidentally?**

I appreciate the idea that there might be a 'trademark' sound, I think ultimately that's something I'd hoped to achieve. But I rarely think very hard about what's going to go into a song beyond the key elements like guitar and vocals... everything else tends to reveal itself fairly naturally during the recording process, and this is how I've worked since my earliest days of exploring the range of capabilities on my four-track. You know, putting 5 or 6 things on one track throughout a song or playing two instruments at once while singing. Or pressing the pause button rapidly while recording to get a tape collage effect, or maximising the fact that you can reverse things. Sound is tremendous fun.

**How come that on the one hand your songs hardly reach the three-minute mark (like classic pop from the 50s/60s), on the other hand**

**you always avoid the usual verse/chorus/verse design?**

I've recognised that there is a reasonably distinct set of song structures from which I work. I've never been taught how to write a 'proper' song, nor do I particularly care, but I really like the process of organising patterns and shifts. My notebooks are cluttered with revisions; there'll be at least 3 or 4 versions of a song before I settle, generally. As for the issue of length, I try to abide by a policy of not overstaying my welcome. My friends are always telling me that I go home too early at the end of the night, though.

**Please tell me a bit about the 'Lee' 7" that you released in late '08...**

This was sort of a pet project that I'd wanted to do for a while, because Lee Hazlewood wrote so many songs that are so incredible to me, and that I find myself singing frequently. When he passed away on my birthday, I took that as the sign to finally get to it, and the next time that I put the Nancy & Lee record on the stereo, the song *Sundown*, *Sundown* jumped out at me. So there's a cover of that one, and the B-side is a version of a really great Ink Spots tune called *Someone's Rocking My Dreamboat* for which I used bass, bells and harmonica.

**Would you agree that your music doesn't necessarily sound sad or melancholic, but rather lonely and cathartic?**

I'm incapable of assessing something like that objectively. I mean, I do feel a certain detachment from both records now that they are out of my hands and off into the public, but the project remains a part of my daily life more or less, so I have these constant ties to it. I can say for sure that *Précis* came from a place of loneliness and catharsis - and its release effectively ended that stage of my existence - so I think you're on the right page with that. I'm rarely, if ever, sad about things very much, I recognise that we all come from an immense calm, and I am a rather lucky individual amid the bizarre and unfair universe in which we exist.

My music is much more a reflection on what's happened so far. In fact many lyrics come from notes or ideas from long ago, so the things I make in the current era are, to some degree, an assemblage

of myself at many stages. Of course the overarching influence will always be contemporary circumstances, since they guide my usage of the old material, but it's a great thing to have so many years' worth of tape at my disposal. A track I'm releasing in the near future contains a drone built from a tape I recorded in 1999, for example. Also I'm an obsessive planner, but only for the very near future, I can't perceive very much in the long-term and am fairly easy to please, so there's not much yearning going on.

**After listening to *Temper* I came to the conclusion that whenever some genius plans on doing a remake of *The Graduate*, he should certainly call you for the soundtrack...**

Well first of all, no one should try to remake *The Graduate*, the original is brilliant. But yes, I would take that as a compliment, in that the soundtrack is quite good at conveying a certain mood that corresponds to a very specific time. I've really enjoyed writing scores for short films in the past, both my own and those of some friends, so it's definitely work to which I wouldn't be opposed.

**Are you already working on new material or will you take a break from music in order to focus more on your photography?**

Music and photography are both constant hobbies, so there's rarely a favouring of one over the other, and I also don't really plan for either of them beyond the spur of the moment. I have some new songs put together, however, and will be working at documenting them sometime before spring with any luck. There's also been discussion about a possible tour with some friends of mine in Michigan, so we'll see what happens with that. Past is prologue.

temper | album | Kranky  
Lee | 7" | available through Benoit Pioulard's website  
www.pioulard.com

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