

ARRINGTON DE DIONYSO

[interview]

Presenting music without lyrics I think allows one to maybe open up to a different kind of listening. You're not trying to make out words or interpret what the lyrics mean. You just take in this kind of pure—these waves of sound that are just surrounding you, and you can take in the physical sensations of the sound, hopefully creating colors with the sound.

Music like that, it's just like lightning, just like *wsshew!* It's like these shockwaves of rainbow energy, and I find it really exciting in a very physical, visceral way.

My name is Arrington de Dionyso. I live in Olympia, Washington, and I'm a musician and visual artist, and I'm on tour across the United States. I'm presenting my music under the title *This Saxophone Kills Fascists*, in homage to Woody Guthrie, and also incorporating a variety of influences from I guess I would call it the legacy of spiritual free jazz.

I think I started out on a tenor saxophone, and then did I go to bass clarinet after that? There was tenor sax, bass clarinet, definitely baritone sax at the end. In the middle I had an Indonesian flute that's called a *suling*. And then I played a series of PVC pipe instruments that I invented called the Bromiophone, which involve fitting the neck and mouthpiece of a bass clarinet onto this ever changing network of PVC pipes.

I would say that the music I make is a type of folk music. I would say that to define it as such allows for an expansive definition of culture.

[concert recording]

First off, I'd just like to say how deeply I appreciate all of you being here tonight.

*This saxophone kills fascists*

*This saxophone growls like a panther*

*This saxophone screams like an eagle*

*This saxophone creates in the face of destruction*

*This saxophone wails for the freedom of all people*

*This saxophone flips the middle finger*

*This saxophone is powered by the sun and the moon*

*This saxophone rearranges atoms*

*This saxophone brings down the walls of Jericho*

*This saxophone marches on Washington*

*This saxophone sometimes whispers*

*This saxophone sings with seven voices and spits fire in seven languages*

*This saxophone neutralizes poison*

*This saxophone turns swords into other saxophones*

*This saxophone is a lion, not a lamb, turns water into wine, turns oil back into dinosaurs*

[interview]

I was in junior high school in Spokane, Washington, which I found to be a pretty boring, fairly unstimulating cultural landscape. The school that I went to was fairly homogenous and I didn't really

meet a lot of other people who were interested in investigating the world around them in the way that I was most curious about.

And in my public library, I found that there was an extensive archive of old vinyl records with a really big section on Smithsonian Folkways albums and all the original vinyl records going back through the '60s. I started out bringing records home based on the cover art. I was really curious about African music, but from there I went to every region of Asia, a lot of the older European folk music styles, American folk music, of course, and the archival recordings of indigenous American folk music, South American, Peru, Bolivian. I think they had Australian aboriginal recordings.

Taking a record home and listening to it was just a part of the experience. There were these booklets that came in them with really extensive notes that were all typed out on a typewriter, and I don't know if they were mimeographing it, or how they were reproducing things back in the day, but sometimes very extensive notes on each song—like, oh, this is a funeral song from the Maori, or this is a wedding song from the Balkans—and getting into all the wonderful details of the context music came from.

It gave me a lot of inspiration and energy to, as I got older, taking ethnomusicology as a serious subject of study and learning that it's not just about—you're not just analyzing chord progressions or rhythms, or time signatures and things like that, it's the cultural context from which the music emerges and exists in, and inhabits, and the lives of the people who make the music, and what is it in their cultural milieu that encourages that kind of musical expression, or what sort of circumstances do they have to fight *against* to be able to make that musical expression. All of those things are very important subjects for consideration and part of the whole thing, the whole big picture.

My message is a message of resistance and a message of finding pure energy in sound. I believe that music has the power to be a force for healing. It's like a cathartic force, and so I think that there's a very important kind of therapeutic dimension to that, both for performance and for listener.

Artists as a whole are a very vulnerable community, and any time in history when there is some kind of state sanctioned repression or the types of crackdowns we see in dictatorships, the artists are among the very first class of people to be attacked, as a prelude to other types of minority communities also being under attack.

There are many artists who probably don't feel the work they do is necessarily political, like I just make pretty paintings or something, I'm not trying to be outspoken. I think that to be alive in this day and age as an artist and to be part of this continuum of history unfolding, I do think that artists have a certain obligation. It's *not* just about making pretty pictures, it's about exploring the substance that you're presenting. It's not to say that art that is explicitly politicized is necessarily the best art either. I think that there's a lot to be said for the way messages can be implicit in a work of art or music rather than explicit.

For example, in the 1960s when desegregation and civil rights is this huge issue impacting everyone everywhere, one strategy could be to put forward songs with a certain type of lyric content and advocating for specific messages, which is still an important thing to do, but also organizing groups of musicians that are desegregated and integrated with people representing different cultures and perspectives performing different music together—it could be instrumental music without lyrical

content—and there's still an implicit statement being made just by the dynamic of the group of musicians gathered to perform together.

Music is weird because I sometimes feel like a huge percentage of music being performed and listened to is kind of like music presented specifically to help sell beer. But the power of music goes much deeper than that as well. There's a much more subversive power that I think can be used to both unite people around identifying factors, but it can also be presented in ways that challenge a listener to think of the universe in a more expanded way.