

STORIES OF IMPACT
DOUGLAS R. EWART'S
Crepuscule



EDITED BY AJAY HEBLE

STORIES OF IMPACT



DOUGLAS R. EWART'S
Crepuscule

EDITED BY AJAY HEBLE

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL STUDIES IN IMPROVISATION

PS GUELPH

I LOVE YOU
 I LOVE MYSELF
 I LOVE THE HUMAN
 SPIRIT I LOVE
 YOU I LOVE MY
 SELF I LOVE THE
 HUMAN SPIRIT I
 LOVE YOU I LOVE
 MYSELF I LOVE
 THE HUMAN SPIRIT
 THANK YOU SO MUCH, JAKE PARKER
 SCOTT

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	v
Douglas R. Ewart's <i>Crepuscule</i> : Stories of Impact Ajay Heble	1
Artist Statement Douglas R. Ewart	3
Circles of Connection: Reflections on <i>Crepuscule</i> Ed Sarath	5
<i>Crepuscule 2016</i>	9
A Total Community Embrace: Douglas R. Ewart in Conversation with Ajay Heble Ajay Heble and Douglas R. Ewart	17
<i>Crepuscule 2018</i>	32
<i>Crepuscule</i> as Echolocation Michael Collins	39
Collaborative Assemblage, Activism, and the Improvisation of Daily Life Jeannette Hicks and Brian Lefresne	45



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE WORK REPRESENTED HERE HAS EMERGED OUT OF A GENUINE SPIRIT of collaboration, and there are many individuals who have come together to create this exhibition and book. Thank you to all the authors for your insights and contributions to this volume.

Thanks to the amazing staff at the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI), for their role in coordinating this exhibit and for their work on this publication. I'm especially grateful to Justine Richardson (Project Manager) and Rachel Collins (Administrative Assistant) for their ongoing work on both these projects.

I'm grateful, too, to have had the chance to work with several exceptional students on this exhibition, including Jeannette Hicks and Richelle Forsey, who were instrumental in the curation and creation of the exhibition. Richelle, in particular, designed and built many key installation components, including the pen for the tops and the stands for the skis. I'm also grateful to Aidan Cowling, for his assistance installing the exhibit, and to Carey West, for her help coordinating the Guelph launch event and for assisting with the transportation of materials.

We've also had a number of students support the production of this volume, including Jackson Klie, who photographed all the instruments and artefacts; Kathe Gray, for her work and care in designing this book; and Kimber Sider, for filming my interview with Douglas

at the 2015 Guelph Jazz Festival, the transcript of which I am pleased to publish here.

I'd also like to thank the Robert Langen Art Gallery at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo for hosting the exhibition and for their support and guidance during the conceptualization and mounting of the exhibit. Special thanks to Suzanne Luke, Darin White, and Nick Dinka.

I'm grateful also for the support of the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute (CESI) at the University of Guelph and 10C, for their role in hosting the Guelph iteration of the exhibit. Special thanks to Joy Sammy at 10C and Elizabeth Jackson, Caroline Duvieusart-Déry, and Melissa MacKay from CESI.

Thanks, too, to Scott Thomson and Julie Hastings at the Guelph Jazz Festival for their support and collaboration on the Guelph launch event. Special thanks to Michael Forsey and Jamie Jones for their role in creating the materials needed to mount this exhibition.

Huge thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their support of the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation through the Partnership Grant program, and to Musagetes, for their support of the Improviser-in-Residence program.

Lastly, none of this would have been possible without the vision, heart, and creative spirit of Douglas R. Ewart. Thanks so much, Douglas, for bringing your amazing energy to Guelph, and along with it, *Crepuscule*. I'm glad to celebrate it in this volume and exhibition.

AJAY HEBLE, DIRECTOR
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL STUDIES IN IMPROVISATION

| | | | |

ON BEHALF OF THE ROBERT LANGEN ART GALLERY, I WANT TO EXPRESS my deepest appreciation to Douglas R. Ewart for his unrelenting enthusiasm for this exhibition. A special thanks to the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation at the University of Guelph — especially Ajay Heble, Justine Richardson, Jeannette Hicks,

Richelle Forsey, and Jackson Klie. Without your collaborative spirit and continued support, this exhibition would not have come to fruition. For that, I am sincerely grateful.

SUZANNE LUKE, CURATOR
ROBERT LANGEN ART GALLERY, WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY



DOUGLAS R. EWART'S *CREPUSCULE*: STORIES OF IMPACT

WHEN DOUGLAS EWART FIRST DESCRIBED TO ME HIS COMMUNITY-BASED *Crepuscule* project, I was keen to find a way to realize his vision in Guelph, the community where I live and work. The Improviser-in-Residence initiative, a partnership among the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI), Musagetes, and Wilfrid Laurier University, turned out to be the perfect fit for Douglas's project. And what better time to stage Douglas's Guelph residency than during the 50th anniversary of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), the important musicians' organization with which Douglas has had a long involvement, and for which he has served as chairperson? Recall that Douglas had been in our community ten years earlier during the Guelph Jazz Festival as part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the AACM. Now, as part of the AACM's 50th anniversary celebrations, and during his time as our 2015–2016 Improviser-in-Residence, Douglas performed at the 2015 Guelph Jazz Festival and Colloquium, and he remained in Guelph and Waterloo throughout the fall, conducting master classes, giving talks, leading instrument-building workshops. He returned in April 2016 to conduct additional workshops, leading up to the culminating event of the residency, the Canadian premiere of *Crepuscule*, which took place on May 14, 2016 at the beautiful Arboretum Centre in Guelph. It was also wonderful that we were able to schedule *Crepuscule* as part of the

2016 edition of the International Society for Improvised Music (ISIM) conference.

We've chronicled Douglas's residency in various documents, including in a beautiful short video piece by the Brazilian filmmaker João França (available here: http://improvisationinstitute.ca/research-project/douglas-ewart-iir_2015/). But what I find particularly compelling is this: although Douglas's residency is now formally over, *Crepuscule* lives on. It lives on in the materials, instruments, and artefacts showcased in the exhibition celebrated in this catalogue. It lives on in the self-learning potential of the many partners, pods, and communities of interest who participated as part of the project in its earlier iteration. It lives on in the capacity of those partners to attract further collaboration, and in the ripple effects unleashed through their stories, their memories, and their shared experiences. *Crepuscule*, in short, is so much more than a performance, so much more than a completed event. As this book and the exhibition make clear, the project's adaptive, ongoing, and improvisational nature offers us a vital clue to its social force, to its stories of impact. Douglas himself describes *Crepuscule* as an event that "brings together diverse people and communities from all walks of life in a massive and organized improvisation." That improvisation is at the project's core, indeed, should command our attention. Making reference to one of the central objectives for *Crepuscule*, Douglas, in the interview I conducted with him, speaks about "learning from each other, because that's the other thing about improvisation . . . You learn by playing with other improvisers, other seekers of sonic knowledge . . . you shine better if you're in the company of other people that are thinking too." It is in that spirit of playing with and learning from each other that I'm pleased, in the pages that follow, to share these reflections and stories of impact from *Crepuscule*.

| DOUGLAS R. EWART

ARTIST STATEMENT

SOUND AND STORIES ARE CRUCIAL SPIRITUAL, EMOTIONAL, AND intellectual foods that we all must partake of in order to thrive! Sound and stories can remind us that life is rewarding and worth living—even with its current obstacles and challenges. There is vast potential and possibility if we share the wealth of the Earth in a more respectful, responsible, custodial, and equitable manner.

Crepuscule is my response to these concerns. Each event is a massive, coordinated improvisation that brings together diverse people from all walks of life. I use artistic interaction and performance to help us realize how interdependent the individual and the community are, that the dynamism of one fosters the vitality of the other. I think of *Crepuscule* as a microcosm of society where many disciplines can converge. Through active participation and performance, we experience the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual beauty of our communities and individual selves. I want the work to sustain open dialogue between people and to deepen community interactions over days, weeks, months, and years.

Crepuscule usually takes place near nature—a body of water, trees, or botanical gardens—as a means of drawing energy from the setting itself. At the gathering, community groups play their own music, and I offer musical themes and texts around which to improvise. As a demonstration of unity and community, people join hands at some

point during the event. The circle we make is imagined as a source of endless nature and power.

I began organizing *Crepuscule* events in Minneapolis in 1993. I have since been invited to bring *Crepuscule* to various sites in Philadelphia, Chicago, Paris, and Guelph, over a number of years in some places. Each incarnation of the project responds to the uniqueness of the communities it serves. However, across all sites, the event setting is transformed into an oasis of beauty, sound, and connection, with children and adults alike coming together to perform across difference.

About the Artist

Douglas R. Ewart is a versatile composer, improviser, sculptor, and maker of masks and instruments. He is also an inspiring and enthusiastic educator and lecturer. Through his acclaimed 40-year career, Ewart has led projects in diverse media, weaving his many talents into a single sensibility that encourages and celebrates the wholeness of individuals in culturally active communities.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Ewart began experimenting with making toys and instruments from found materials at an early age. After immigrating to the US, he learned to be a tailor, developing skills now crucial to his costume-making. He also studied saxophone and clarinet at the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). In the years since, he has learned shakuhachi flute construction, performance, and history with Japanese masters, as well as the didjeridu with native Australian masters.

Ewart is a renowned craftsman. His shakuhachi and bamboo flutes, rain sticks, and kinetic sound sculptures have been exhibited internationally. He is also a master saxophonist and wind player who has toured the world solo and with leading members of the sonic vanguard. In addition to recording his own compositions, he has appeared on albums with George Lewis, Anthony Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell, and Henry Threadgill, among others.

Ewart is the recipient of a prestigious Bush Foundation Fellowship in Music Composition and is the former chair of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM).

ED SARATH

CIRCLES OF CONNECTION: REFLECTIONS ON *CREPUSCULE*

DOUGLAS EWART'S IMPACT ON THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC SCENE AND society at large spans decades of contributions as improviser, composer, multi-disciplinary artist, instrument-maker, organizational leader, community activist, and arts-based visionary. Although I had known of Douglas and his work for many years, it was not until 1999 that I met him (as well as Ajay Heble) in person at the "Improvising Across Borders" symposium hosted by George Lewis and his colleagues at the University of California, San Diego. Douglas's presence—in sound, word, and spirit—was powerful, and it was only natural that he'd later be involved with the International Society for Improvised Music (ISIM), an organization that I founded in 2004, which was significantly inspired by the UCSD event. At the fifth ISIM festival/conference, held at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Douglas was one of the keynote performers and led the University of Michigan Creative Arts Orchestra through a riveting concert of his compositions. Only in the presence of artistry of the highest order can twenty musicians come together and, on a single rehearsal, put together a compelling program of music that bridges the worlds of the improvised and the composed as effectively as was witnessed during that event. Not long after that, Douglas joined the ISIM Board of Directors, where he was a consistent source of inspiration and ideas, and an essential component of the first decade of the organization's existence.

It was thus entirely fitting—and I could not have been more thrilled at the opportunity—to collaborate with the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI) to make Douglas’s piece *Crepuscule* a part of the ninth ISIM festival/conference. Bringing together people and communities from diverse backgrounds, breaking down boundaries between culture, class, gender, and ethnicity, embedding music performance and creation within its physical environment, and—perhaps most significantly—dissolving roles between musician and listener; it is difficult to imagine a work that more directly reflects Douglas’s vision than *Crepuscule*. Even the onset of unseasonably cold weather on an otherwise glorious, sunny day in May could not dampen the spirit of the music nor the enthusiasm of the participants. While I, like most brass players, do not savor playing outdoors in those kinds of temperatures, I was so happy I had my flugelhorn with me when I heard this group of youngsters from a local school playing a splendid rendition of Sonny Rollins’s “St. Thomas.” I could not help but join right in. The fact that I was welcomed by the students and their teacher so warmly was as meaningful as any performance opportunity I can imagine involving the heaviest cats on the scene and reflected the all-encompassing flow of creativity, joy, and love that characterized the entire afternoon.

The fact that *Crepuscule* evolved from an earlier work of Douglas’s called *Wondrous Waters*, commissioned by the McKnight Foundation, is consistent with the continually evolving spirit of the work. In other words, just as a given improvisation organically spins out from an initial idea, so does a compositional framework that harnesses the improvisatory thrust and is thereby capable of adapting to new surroundings and circumstances. The version of *Crepuscule* that we experienced in May 2016 was the most recent manifestation of this unfolding at that moment; who knows what the future holds for this dynamic work/play? In a project that evolved from involving, as Douglas put it, “just an orchestra with a relatively passive audience into an orchestra of community and activities, indeed a microcosm of society where many disciplines could converge,” the sky is truly the limit.

Also vivid in my recollection of the performance in Guelph is the participation of AACM luminary Ann Ward, a memory that has become all the more poignant and deeply etched in my awareness and heart given the fact that she passed away in the months after that performance. Her contributions to the AACM and the music world and

community at large cannot be overstated. The AACM percussionist Art “Turk” Burton’s rumination of Ann now being a member of a “celestial orchestra” elicits further insights about the dimensions of *Crepuscule*, which from this standpoint might be seen as transcendent of time and space, perhaps prophetic in nature, and in its dissolution of further kinds of boundaries—those that separate physical and spiritual existence—a celebration of the cycles of life.

Here the broader significance of the AACM, of which Douglas has served as not only longtime and seminal member but also chairperson, bears recognition. George Lewis, in his landmark book, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The History of the AACM and American Experimental Music*, heralds the organization for its exploration of “new and expanded ideas about timbre, sound, collectivity, extended technique, relationship between improvisation and composition, intermedia, invented instruments, and installations.”¹ Lewis goes on to cite the AACM’s pursuit of “strategies for individual and collective self-production and promotion that both reframed the artist-business relationship, and challenged racialized limitations on venues and infrastructure.”² If the AACM vision could be encapsulated in the work of a single artist, Douglas Ewart would surely be among the first that comes to mind, with perhaps a work like *Crepuscule* looming large were one to seek an even more localized manifestation of the AACM scope.

Of particular personal interest to me are the educational ramifications of the AACM paradigm. As I emphasize in a range of writing, among the most notable shortcomings in all of education is the extent to which the AACM—among the most prominent movements in late-twentieth and early twenty-first century musical and social practice—has been overlooked in, at the very least, jazz studies programs in North America, and arguably in the academy at large. In penetrating deep into the African American origins of jazz, unleashing unprecedented creative explorations of global magnitude that defied categorization, situating musical artistry within a social context, empowering artists as activists, and also enlivening connections with creative and spiritual foundations of human existence, meaning, and evolutionary potential, the AACM in a single stroke yielded a framework for entirely new approaches not only to jazz, but to music studies at large. “If the jazz-driven transformation of music studies is to transpire,” as I state in my most recent book, *Black Music Matters: Jazz and the Transformation of Music Studies*, “jazz education itself needs to reconnect with the creative and spiritual roots

of the music as embodied in the AACM and other initiatives that have minimally informed academic jazz study.”³ Appropriating principles of a consciousness-based worldview called Integral Theory, I delineate a transformational chain that extends from an AACM-inspired model of jazz and music studies to an integral approach to education at large to corresponding arts-driven societal transformation. Indeed, one of the reasons I founded ISIM was to harness the contributions of the AACM in jazz and improvised music pedagogy as a catalyst for this overarching creativity/consciousness revolution. While much work remains to be done within the ISIM organization itself, let alone in jazz and music studies, in order to lay claim to any degree of success toward these ends, the AACM—and Douglas Ewart’s important work through and beyond that format—is never far from view in terms of guidance and inspiration.

At a moment in which society is riddled by all manner of divisions, the need for this very arts-driven inspiration, guidance, and unifying experience on a broader scale has never been more urgent. *Crepuscule* is Douglas R. Ewart’s magnificent response to this need. Describing a central principle of the work as the empowerment of individuals and community through a circle of connection, he states that “when people join hands, the circle becomes galvanized through the collective power of each individual.” What timely wisdom for a world fraught with fear and conflict, yet brimming with hope and evolutionary potential. May *Crepuscule* be among the many invitations that the arts in general, and improvised musical art in particular, provide for embrace of this principle.

8 |

Endnotes

- 1 Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself*, ix.
- 2 Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself*, ix.
- 3 Sarath, *Black Music Matters*, xv.

Works Cited

Lewis, George E. *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008.

Sarath, Ed. *Black Music Matters: Jazz and the Transformation of Music Studies*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018.

Crepuscule events are large, organized community improvisations. Through sound and story, people are invited to participate in multiple forms of art-making, building a sense of community cohesion and creative energy. The 2016 Crepuscule event in Guelph was made possible through the efforts of many individuals from the production team to the pod participants to our community partners to the audience members who braved a wet and chilly spring day.

We recognize the following individuals and groups for their participation in organizing and executing *Crepuscule – Guelph*: the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (especially Rachel Collins, Sylvie Di Leonardo, Rachel Elliott, Richelle Forsey, João França,

Kathe Gray, Jeannette Hicks, Elizabeth Jackson, David Lee, Brian Lefresne, Adam Maclsaac, & Justine Richardson), Musagetes (especially Elwood Jimmy & Shawn Van Sluys), and the Laurier Centre for Music in the Community (especially Peter Hatch & Laura Stinson).

We also recognize the following individuals and organizations for their role in Crepuscule 2016: The Arboretum & Dawn Ann Webster, the Button Factory, Diyode, the International Society for Improvised Music, Vish Khanna, Harald Kisiedu, Dawn Matheson, Ed Sarath, and the University of Guelph (especially the Gryph N' Grille food truck & Hospitality Services).

We recognize the following pods for their participation in the event: the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (Khari B, Douglas R. Ewart, & Ann Ward); Cold Mountain Internal Arts (Steve Higgins, Lisbeth Haddad, & Peter Reist); Environmental Percussion (Rich Burrows); Four Spoken Word Poets (Lisa Baird, Fannon Holland, David James Hudson, & Amelia Meister); the Guelph GoGo Grandmothers; Guelph Mighty Uke Club; Guelph Youth Dance (dir. Catrina von Radecki); Guelph Youth Jazz Ensemble (dir. Brent Rowan); IMAGEO Dance (led by Georgia Simms); KW Habilitation; Luyos MC; Makin' Faces Face Painting / Infinite Body Arts; Mino Ode

Kwewak N'gamowak (Good Hearted Women Singers); NUMUS Improv Ensemble (dir. Kathryn Ladano); John Oswald, David Prentice, & Scott Thomson; Puppets Elora; Silence & Morning Music; Sorbara Parsons Do Their Thing (with Joe Sorbara & his children, Victoria, Nico, & Reine Sorbara-Parsons); Two Cellos (with Matt Brubeck & Isaiah Farahbakhsh); the University of Guelph Concert Choir (dir. Marta McCarthy); and Voices in the Wilderness (Shannon Kingsbury, Carey West, Tanis Slimmon, & Sue Smith).

We recognize the community elders honoured during the event: Jean Becker, Mari Biehn, Allan Brown & Marva Wisdom, Mike Craig & Mary-Kate Gilbertson, Cathy Cripps, Kelly Laurila, and Beverly Matson.

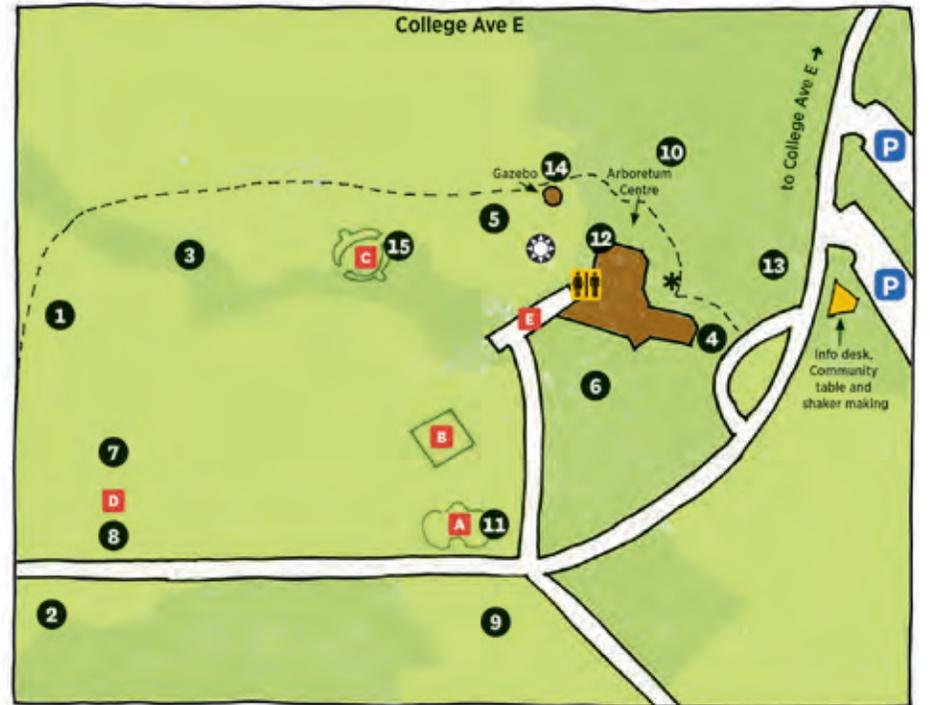
As well, we recognize the many volunteers, pod participants, and audience members not listed here.

Crepuscule and the Improviser-in-Residence program are funded by Musagetes and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

► Douglas R. Ewart leading the procession of pods through the Arboretum woods to gather in the opening circle.







Artists and community groups organized as pods and collaborating during the community improvisation event *Crepuscule*, University of Guelph Arboretum, May 14, 2016.



“A TOTAL COMMUNITY EMBRACE”: DOUGLAS R. EWART IN CONVERSATION WITH AJAY HEBLE

*During the 2015 edition of the Guelph Jazz Festival Colloquium, I had the opportunity to sit down with Douglas R. Ewart for an onstage interview on the occasion of his taking up a position as 2015–2016 Improviser-in-Residence with the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI) and Musagetes. In this abridged transcript from our interview, I ask Douglas to reflect on the origins and broader implications of *Crepuscule*, the large-scale community improvisation that was to form the centerpiece of his residency in Guelph.*

| 17

AJAY We're thrilled to have you in our community, Douglas, and I'm particularly excited to take this opportunity to welcome you as our 2015 Improviser-in-Residence.

When you first started telling me about the work you were doing with the *Crepuscule* project, I was fascinated, and I wanted to find some way to make that happen here. So I'm really, really excited to have this chance. The Improviser-in-Residence seemed a perfect fit for that project—the *Crepuscule* project—and it also seems appropriate to have you here, given that it's the fiftieth anniversary of the AACM.

So perhaps to start off, could you talk a little bit about *Crepuscule*, how it came about, what were your objectives when you conceptualised the project? I know it's gone through many iterations. Perhaps you can talk about how it's evolved over the years, and maybe a little bit about what you hope to do while you're in Guelph.

DOUGLAS Good morning, everyone. Good to see everyone here this early ... I'm really happy to be back in Guelph, and this time to have an opportunity to know about the community a little more in detail, as opposed to the last time, which was what I call a quick march.

The piece *Crepuscule* came out of a commission which was called *Wondrous Waters*, and the idea was to explore playing, both from land and from water, and so I engaged a sculling team, along with renting canoes and having players playing from the water and playing from the land.

The piece was done in the fall—I think the first time was 1992 in Powderhorn Park in south Minneapolis, Minnesota—and so it was called *Wondrous Waters*. But since it occurred at—I think it was the first week in October—I thought, wow, “Crepuscule” is a much nicer-sounding word, and an interesting-sounding word, and is applicable to the season, the time of the year, and it was done towards dusk of the day. I was introduced to the word as a young listener by Thelonious Monk’s “Crepuscule with Nellie,” which is a salute to his very dedicated wife. You don’t hear much about Nellie, but without her, Thelonious would not have made some of the wonderful music that he was able to make. She was incredible; there’s a great film that you should look at. It’s called *Straight No Chaser* and it gives you a great insight into her dedication to him and her understanding of him.

Anyway, I decided to name the piece *Crepuscule*, which a lot of people became incensed by, interestingly enough. They were like, “why don’t you use the word ‘twilight’ instead of Crep-Crepus-Crepuscu...” So I said, how do we increase our vocabulary and our understanding of words if we don’t use words that we don’t know? And for other people from other cultures, it was just—like when we did the piece in France, it was just, “Oh, *Crepuscule!*”

So anyway, I called it *Crepuscule*, and what it did was open the port-holes of concepts and systems of conducts; it allowed me to utilise many art forms and many disciplines and practices, and removed any boundaries as to whether this was music, this was Tai Chi, this was juggling, but bringing people together in whatever activity they were engaged in already, or to bring artists into communities, to work with people, young and up to people that are seniors. *Crepuscule* has a particular form or structure to the work, where we gathered in a particular area in the venue. Usually, we’d find a very old tree and/or a source of water and



gather there. Trees have spirit and power in my estimation. In the case of Philadelphia, we did it in Bartram’s Garden, which is the oldest botanical garden in North America. John Bartram was a quintessential botanist, horticulturist, and a contemporary of Ben Franklin, and he was also a mason. Anyway, this is an interesting place, Bartram’s Garden.

And we did it under this old gingko tree, where we assembled everyone and we started the piece out with an invocation—a musical invocation—usually utilizing didgeridoos, conch shell trumpets, bells, and so on, and then we would disperse, and each pod, as I call them—as a way of saluting whales and having a more elastic name for ensembles, I’m very much attracted and engaged, enthralled with and interested in whales of all kinds. And so we’d go to pre-designated areas; we would stay in that area, perform, and then we’d have an interactive period within the piece, where people of different disciplines would try to engage each other, try to find some kind of unison, some symbiosis, and then they would move on to another one, another pod. And so that kind of interactive aspect would occur, and then we would reunite as a group toward the culmination of the work.

In ensuing years, what happened was, we started to also salute people from the community, people that are often not thought of or cited, or bigged up, if there is such a word. Bigged up. Well, there is such a concept in our communities. You know, we would honour the crossing guards—I remember people when I was a kid, that would ask you when you were coming home from school—people you didn’t know, but they knew your family. And some people didn’t know you at all, they were just curious about what you had been doing in school, and you couldn’t respond to them, oh, I’m okay, or, I’ve done fine. They’d query you



further ... what do you mean, you're doing okay ... fine? What does fine mean? What did you study today? And I found that kind of interrogation ... a means of developing self-assurance, as you had to give an accounting of your activities in a concise and meaningful manner, and somebody that's interested in you, that you were important to them and to a community. And so we began to salute people from the community from all walks of life.

And what I would do—or we would do—was have the children select some of who these people would be. So it became a total community embrace, if you will, and so *Crepuscle* has grown into a more encompassing concept.

So at the end we would—that first part of saluting the elder would take place right after the invocation, and then the dispersal to designated places, then the interactive part—and then we would coalesce at the end of the work and we'd make other circles within the larger circle to showcase some of the pods and because of the idea of circles, the endless nature of them, and the power of the circle, very strong and virtually unbreakable ... a symbol of unity.

One of the things that I experienced once was to show the power of the circle, is, if you form a circle and you hold hands, you can have people try to break through it and it's virtually impossible, even if the people are not as strong as the person that is trying to break the circle. There's something that occurs that galvanizes us and makes us go beyond the individual strength that we have.

Anyway, so we do that, have a feature in the center, and then at the end, we would have these different mantras that we would say. For example, "I love myself, I love the human spirit," is one that we would use. It's from a book called *Shout*, a book of Zen writings, and another one is, "we are them and they are us," because you know, we're always pointing to other people as though they're outsiders, when we're really quite connected. And when you point to others you usually have three fingers of that same hand pointing back at you.

And that's—the whole idea is to work together to see the beauty in ourselves and in each other, and in order to love other people, you really need to love yourself. It's not the narcissistic idea of myself, but rather the communal idea of the self and the importance of the individual. A strong community makes a strong individual, and strong individuals help to make strong communities, and they transform communities.

AJAY I think that gives us a really good sense of the project. Maybe you could talk a little bit about what you hope to do while you're in Guelph with *Crepuscle*.

DOUGLAS Well, the initial thing that occurs is looking at the community, see what practices are already in vogue, in the process, and bring those into *Crepuscle*, rather than trying to start everything from scratch. Because there are many people that are practicing, and you don't get to see what their practice is, because it might be—let's say a

karate group that practices in their dojo, and you don't see their work and efforts because it is done privately.

We did this work ... *Crepuscule* in Aubervilliers, which is a suburb of Paris, and is a powerful community—many refugees, young people were there, and some of them were very troublesome and problematic, as I was as a child ... teenager.

So in recruiting for *Crepuscule*, the project, we went into various communities, schools, community centers, and more. Some of the people were great singers—not necessarily ever participated, let's say, in a choir—or some of them were already engaged in karate. And so we went to these different studios, and to these different teachers, and talked to them, and then we requested the participation of their mentees, the young people. And there had been some instances where the young people weren't in any particular programs. But let's say they were in an after-school program, but it's not focused, and so then you might bring a writer in, you might bring a musician in, a dancer in, a botanist in. Or in one case in Chicago, a doll-maker who made dolls and then had young people tell their stories through the dolls, utilizing the dolls to represent them, and that way you can take the focus—you're telling your story, but you take the focus off of you and thus you can be more open about telling a difficult and very emotional story. And therefore, they felt freer to talk about the things that were troubling for them. Some of them had experienced violence, sexual violence, and so on. So there are many ways to engage the community, to engage the individuals. And so in Aubervilliers, we brought, I don't know, over four hundred performers together, and people from different walks of life ... from the Congo, from Morocco, from Turkey, from France, from America, and more.

And then in Aubervilliers, you find a kind of isolation that takes place, because—colonialism is an interesting thing and a very devastating thing. And it's reflected in how people are relocated when they go to some place like France, or maybe the United States, where they're ghettoized, and it creates numerous problems.

And maybe you remember a few years ago, they had riots in Aubervilliers. So those are some of the things that you see, poverty, deprivation, isolation, unemployment, anger, lack of outlets for expression and education, and then you see a program like *Crepuscule*—and this teacher just flashed across my mind, she is a Frenchwoman, that was teaching circus skills and activities, and she was able to bring

these very troubled young people into juggling, and into different disciplines that are within the circus, and refocus their energies and had them ... sometimes they would almost want to fight each other, and she had a way ... a method to diffuse that and to channel their energy into positive work. So the idea of *Crepuscule* is to galvanize the community, to utilize different disciplines and art forms, to unite and to develop community and the individual.

AJAY I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about improvisation, because in an interview with Philip Blackburn of Innova Recordings, you talk about *Crepuscule* as a kind of massive improvisation that ... involves a wide range of art forms, based on what's available in the communities in which it takes place, so it engages people from all walks of life ... What does improvisation mean to you?

DOUGLAS Life. You know, we improvise all the time. We think more about it in terms of music, theatre, dance ... the arts and we have different names for it—extemporaneous activity, doing it on the fly, creating on impulse—there are various ways of naming improvisation, making it up as you go. Which is true to some degree. But improvisation is a skill; improvisation is something that we study, it's something that we work on. And the people that are good at it, they practice it all the time, they make it a focus. Just as all of us read and write, but there are people that focus on that, and so they can magnify their abilities in reading and writing.

Because sometimes you don't start out as a good writer—I know I've gotten better at it; it wasn't something that was a big focus for me as a child. Like one of my elder sisters showed that promise early, and one of my nephews showed that promise really early—voracious readers. I was more a maker, a tinkerer, and a prankster. I practiced that. [Laughs] And I still practice that.

So for me, improvisation is being open, being ready to try different things. And it doesn't always work, but nothing always works, and so you try different things, being open to experimentation, I think, would be another way—what do they call it? There's a word for it, when you experiment. I can't think of it now, but it's the way that they talk about scientists working, but it's really just improvising, you're just trying things until you come to an understanding, or you stumble



upon something and then you go from there. Einstein was an experimenter ... oh yes; the word is an empiric, an empirical researcher.

And it's not always this brilliant thing that you have innately; it's from experimenting and observation that you come to develop an acuity for improvisation. The good improvisers—we could say John Coltrane was a magnificent improviser, but he practiced sometimes fourteen hours a day, working on these ideas, so he just didn't arrive full-fledged—when you hear that fluid thing that he's doing, he's worked at his instrument, he's governed the nuances of the saxophone and then his harmonic capabilities, his melodic capabilities, his rhythmic capabilities, and his propensity to try and to experiment. And then it became a flow—the flow of ideas for him, because he had amassed such a bank ... a reservoir of ideas that he can pull from.

And so it is with us: if we allow ourselves to experiment and to improvise, then we become better at it. And no one comes to improvisation without some knowledge, especially when you think about music. We've all heard music; we've all listened to music from the womb to our lives now.

So, for example, we've experienced dance or seen people draw. So, you have some notion of how to make a mark, and then you expand on that. So, you are not devoid of the experience of improvisation or of music. I often say, one of the things I'd like to do is finding somebody that's never experienced what we call music, to see what that person would do, how they would react to hearing and making the sound we call music.

AJAY I just want to pick up on something you said a moment ago, and that is that improvisation is a skill. So, how does one to learn to improvise, and how did you learn to improvise? And what role has collaboration in particular played in your development as an improviser?

DOUGLAS I learned to improvise—I can think mainly about toy-making, for example, because I have a piece and we probably won't get to it, the video that is, but it's about spinning tops. People are like, tops in music? I'm like, yeah, tops in music. And they say, well, how does that work? And I say, well, let me show you. And it is a simple yet intricate process as it is a layered process.

You build tops from bamboo, not as simple as one might think, or from wheels, or empty spools, round cutting boards, LPs, and more, you decorate them with paint, markers, collages; you make a grid on the floor with the seven letters of the musical alphabet and numbers from 1 to 15. You spin the tops and when they land on a letter it becomes your pitch, and you can decide to make them naturals, sharps, and/or flats, and your number becomes your interval, number attacks, possible time signatures, durations, number of participants and you create a score from these chance operations, a most creative and improvisational activity ... chance activities if you will.

As kids, growing up in Jamaica, I came from a very rich family in terms of people that cared for you, great foods, readers, people with great integrity, people with skills and more. But we didn't have a lot of money, so—and my grandmother was a woman that was very skeptical

about buying you everything that was around, particularly toys. She would always show you how it wouldn't last long, and she wasn't going to spend her money on that, and that you should make your own things. And of course, at that time, you're thinking, wow, that's kind of wicked. [Laughs] And I'm so glad she was wicked, because—and culturally, most kids made their own toys: we made tops, we made kites, we made bats and balls, we made scooters, and we made cars. At that time, oil came in cans, and we'd cut up the cans and make the hood and the fenders and get bicycle tubes and make frills and all kinds of decorative and functional things for our creations.

So creativity and improvisation were endemic to our childhood. We didn't buy new nails—you might get a few new nails if somebody was constructing something and you'd go and ask a carpenter for a few new nails. But we'd walk around, find old, bent nails—the ones they had pulled out of an old construction—learn how to straighten them, and then learn how to drive them into a piece of wood without bending them again, which took a certain kind of subtlety in hammering.

26 |

So right away, that's improvising at its height. And so, improvisation for me, didn't start in a musical way, but in the process of construction. And in a way, when you make your own things, you tend to become good at figuring things out... how to improvise.

Another benefit to making things is, it gives you a confidence as a child, when you can construct your own kite and somebody is like, wow, where did you get that? I made it. And the paper that we used was very thin tissue paper, like what you would use to wrap a gift—not the outer part of a gift, but you know, when you wrap something—a gift—and you wrap it in that really delicate paper first and then the heavier gift-wrapping paper on the outside of the tissue paper. You'd have to learn how to glue that without putting too much starch and so on, so you... we were learning a lot of different skills at the same time.

We were using bamboo, we were using knives and us thinking of now, how people are skeptical about kids using a machete, we were doing that five, six years old, maybe a little older without cutting our fingers off. And it also taught you responsibility, learning how to use dangerous tools, and your parents and guardians instilling confidence by trusting that you will be cautious and responsible.

We had a lot of freedom, when I think about it, as kids—very unsupervised in many respects, because we had a big yard and I luckily grew up in a community where our backyard opened into almost a hundred

acres of open land. We were gone for hours without any adult seeing what we were doing—real freedom.

So that was my first introduction to improvisation. I never thought of it as improvisation—we just—this is just life, it's just what you do, you know.

AJAY And then how did that translate into music for you?

DOUGLAS Well, I had an interest in playing very early, but I never actualised it, because I always thought I couldn't ask my parents to buy a trumpet or something like that. My first inspiration to play an instrument was Dizzy Gillespie—I wanted to be a trumpet player. And I thought, wow, you know, I mean, there were four of us, plus my cousin, so there were five of us that grew up in the household, and I thought, I couldn't ask my parents to buy a trumpet, it must cost... I never asked what a trumpet cost, or if you could get a second-hand one, so for years I never thought about that.

| 27

The first instrument that I actually tried to play was the drum, and we made them from tin cans. So that was my first kind of—another improvisation. And then later I migrated to the United States in my late teens, and I bought a saxophone, saved my own money. I didn't ask my folks for it, and saved my money and ironically, I bought Joseph Jarman's old alto saxophone—and began to do the autodidactic approach. And then, my first lessons came from Joseph, who became a really powerful mentor for me, and one of the first people to actually not only teach me, but I played with him and he took me on tours with him. So that was how I got formally introduced to music.

And then, in the fall of that year—I bought the saxophone in July, and by October, the AACM school had opened and I began studying there with Muhal Richard Abrams and Anthony Braxton and Roscoe Mitchell and so on. And what made the experience very powerful was, we were learning not only how to compose and to play, but how to put on our own concerts. You'd go talk to somebody in a coffee shop, church, community centre, to allow you to play—finding a place to practice, making your own flyers, developing your audience, going around sticking up your flyers on lamp posts, which was illegal, by the way. [Laughs]

But you know, learning the whole gamut of the business, and so it really hastened our development. I started in '67 and by '68 we were



playing in public. Not necessarily that we were great or anything, but we were convinced that we could be.

AJAY I'm glad you've mentioned the AACM, because in fact, my next question was maybe to get you to reflect a little bit on the ways in which *Crepuscule* may be indebted to some of the key mandates and objectives associated with the AACM.

DOUGLAS The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians was formulated formally in May of 1965. The founders were Stephen "Steve" McCall IV, Muhal Richard Abrams, Phil Cohran, and Jodie Christian. Phil Cohran and Muhal Richard Abrams are the remaining founders that are still with us.

The idea of the group was to be self-determining, because lots of changes were occurring in the business of music. Clubs were getting more difficult to play in, laws were made in Chicago to actually prevent people from having musicians sit in. They tried to limit the size of groups.

Chicago is one of the most segregated cities in the world—today, not yesterday. Now it's what—2015, we're in the twenty-first century. The backwardness of Chicago is incredible, and yet the light there is also incredible. So it has profound light and profound darkness, and hopefully we can expand the light.

Joseph Jarman's work really influenced me tremendously, besides his kindness to me as a young student. His work, it was multidimensional: he was using film, he was using dance, he was using theatre, lights, poetry; and him being a writer and a musician, and he painted. So that impacted my work, as well as other AACM members, there was a lot of experimentation going on, so that influenced my work.

And then, trying that work, *Wondrous Waters*, which was later in my career to some degree, by the nineties—by then I wanted to do something that could be inclusive, rather than exclusive of anything. And I fail to see what is not—what could not be elevated to the level of what we call art.

I remember my grandmother, who—Florence Fowler Kelly—has an indelible impact on my life, because she used to say—and this is long before Martin Luther King's speech about, you know, sweep like Raphael, or you know, some of the great writers. Her thing was always, if you sweep, somebody should come and ask, who swept here?

And if you didn't do a good job sweeping up the yard, she would scatter the debris and have you do it again. And I used to feel at that time, wow, man, this woman is tough. But I'm glad she was, because it created a kind of indomitable character in you, where you had to really do your best, and mediocrity was not celebrated in any way.

So, you know, those things really influenced the work and influenced *Crepuscule*, because I'd been involved in teaching young people in schools, in music, and we made instruments, and then we had to use the instruments in various musical situations and exercises. We didn't only use it to make music, but we used it to make sequencing games—it was games to expand concentration, thinking; their creativity and their own addition to teaching themselves. Because that's really what teaching is about, it is preparing people to acquire knowledge on their own, to develop their own syllabus, their own pedagogy.

So that's what *Crepuscule* really is . . . and sometimes you make statements that are really good, and you have to listen back to them to get a lesson for yourself, that is what I wanted to do with the piece, create a microcosm of what I think our society should be. Which is to really interact with each other and to see the value in each other.

And it's not always easy, and it's not all lovey-dovey; I mean, you have to collide with people sometimes to find out that they're not that bad and you're not that good, [laughs] you know, that you've got some nasty ways about you too, you know, and looking in the mirror.

Those are some of the things I'm hoping that can come out of *Crepuscule*: the interaction, the learning from each other because that's the other thing about improvisation, you learn by playing with great players. You learn by playing with other improvisers, other seekers of sonic knowledge. When you come, you shine better if you're in the company of other people that are thinking too.

AJAY So we're almost out of time, but I have one last question for you, and it really picks up on your notion of *Crepuscule* as a project that attempts to address the specific needs of the communities in which it's taking place, and you've sort of been talking about that a little bit today.

I've been watching a little bit, or reading a little bit, about these AACM interactive healing concerts that were held in the summer in an effort to help restore peace throughout Chicago's violence-ridden neighbourhoods. And Ernest Dawkins is quoted as saying, "we will take highly-developed, healing music into communities grappling with violence, possibly healing some of the wounds."

I'm just wondering if you might want to say something about music as a healing force? The theme of our colloquium this year is partly on issues of healing and wellbeing. Do you have any thoughts on music, or improvised music, or improvised art as a form of healing?

DOUGLAS Well, I think the interactive nature of the music creates the healing, that you have to interact with each other, the players and the audiences. Because music is not always a comfort zone; sometimes things can actually jar you, and sometimes we have to be jarred to think, change, and be healed. Sometimes you have to have a crisis to do the right things, to eat the right things, to have an encounter—a bad encounter and somebody saying, you're eating too much salt, that's why that happened, or you're doing too much sugar. And then, when you go by yourself, you start thinking, and you do some crucial self-analysis and goal setting.

So sometimes, in order to be healed, one has to interrogate the issues and to recognize what the shortcomings are. I don't want to deviate too far; I know that we don't have much time.

One of the things that I ask my students a lot, because I teach at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the greatest schools and museums in the world, and I say, well, you know what's peculiar,

is how we can be surrounded by all this supposed great art, and people are so cruel and wicked to each other. "We're cruel to our loved ones," is one of the lines that I have in a piece. Because I say, look, if the art is so great, then we should be able to just come in this room and sit with the great art, and we should be all refreshed and made nice and whole.

I think that, like medicine, we have to apply it. And we have to think about what it is supposed to do, so when you get angry, you're supposed to say, I've been listening to Bartok and I just listened to Bird, and I'm still evil, what's happening? Is the medicine not being swallowed, or what?

There has to be an interrogation that goes with the food... the medicine. You know, we can eat good food, but if you're eating bad food—too much bad food, you can eat good foods and deviate occasionally—but if you're deviating all the time, then you're just counterproductive to what you're trying to attain and maintain... great health!

So, I think the same is true of music or art, or good literature is that the application has to come through self-interrogation, and you just can't look at a good painting and become civilized, or else we'd all be civilized and be really sweet all the time.

So, I think that application is really important, and the thinking about... one of the things I think about what my grandmother's admonition was, *those who know better, do better*. So if the other person is ignorant or the person is volatile, unscrupulous, and lacks integrity or whatever way we want to characterize them, then it's for you to apply a higher standard of conduct for yourself.

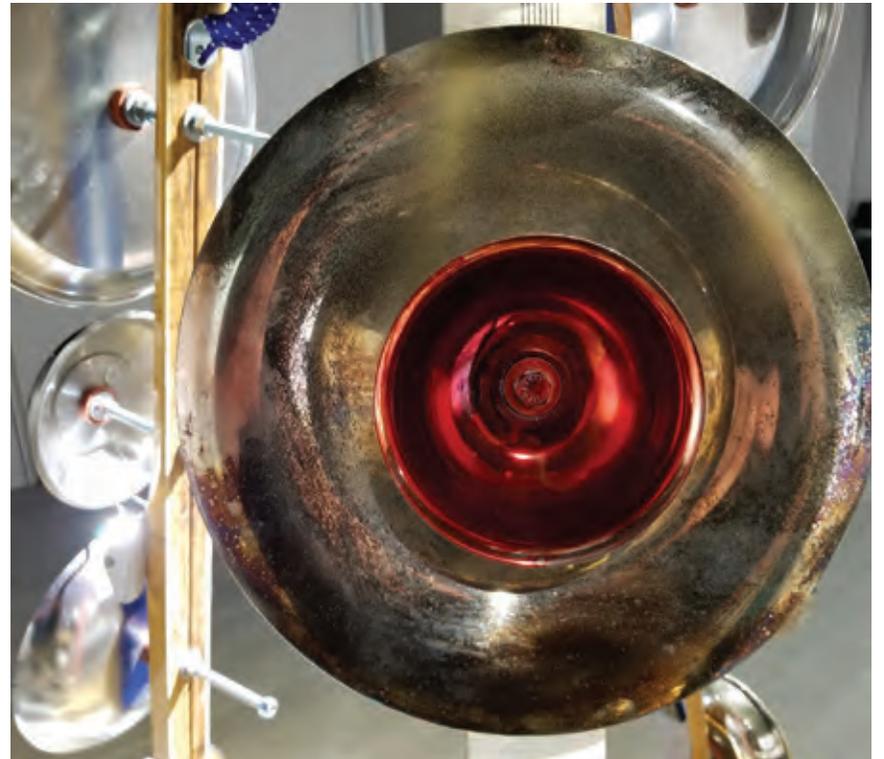
And so it is, I think, with music or with art or—is that once we've taken—you know, if you take medicine and you take it with certain, like let's say milk, it can counteract the medicine; if you take it with acidic fruits or juice, it can counteract the medicine. So we have to think about how does the medicine work best, and part of it is to think about, I've taken this, I'm studying this, I'm supposed to be civilizing myself. How do I know that it's being effective?

And then the interrogation has to take place. And then with the interrogation, then the application has to be incised, you know, stuffed into you... inculcate it. You have to put it in there and keep it in there and really make sure it's being applied, and that it's being absorbed effectively and that you're adapting and manifesting better conducts. Not easy. [Laughs]

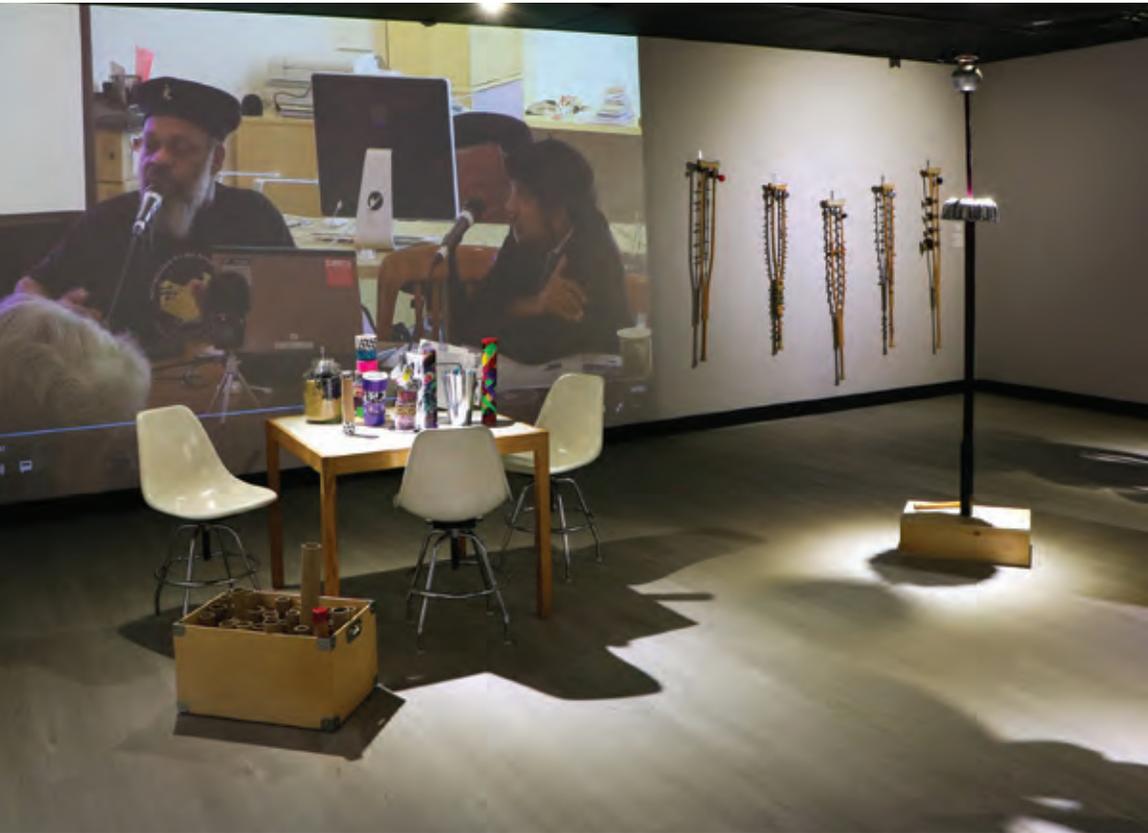
Crepuscule welcomes viewers into a world of open and free interpretation. The transformation of common found objects into clever musical instruments explores the meaning of possibilities and allows for the discovery of the unknown. As a musician, sculptor, and educator, Douglas R. Ewart fosters the power of community improvisation through these interactive and playable sculptural forms. The materials used in the installations reflect the process of making and repurposing central to Ewart's creative ethos. The instruments, videos, images, and tops in the exhibit invite everyone to participate in this community-focused spirit and creative energy.

SUZANNE LUKE





▲ Installation details, Robert Langen Art Gallery, Wilfrid Laurier University.



▲ Installation details, Robert Langen Art Gallery, Wilfrid Laurier University.



CREPUSCULE AS ECHOLOCATION

1.

When I think about music and musical ecosystems, I think about the bats and whales who see with their voices—with echolocation: their cries and clicks come back to them from what they seek and what they seek to avoid, causing them to change their speed and their maneuvering. Art in general and music especially are the human equivalent of the bat's or whale's clicks and cries: at their most effective, art's illuminations bounce off the unseen and guide us toward—or away from—the gifts and risks within it. Religions, with all they have found and destroyed, are hardly conceivable without art and its echolocations.

With or without religion, we need art because the seen for human beings is, more often than not, the expected, the planned for, the prejudged—the cop seeing mortal danger in an unarmed Black body, the NFL player becoming a “son of a bitch” because he kneels during the national anthem, the desperate mother and child treated as threats to national security and torn away from each other. In a world where prejudice is increasingly becoming policy, we desperately need to throw our voices and our minds into the unknown and the unexpected. We need to echolocate some alternative way of doing things. We need, where possible, to explore in the biggest possible artistic and musical ecosystems—and *echosystems*. We need, in short, to explore echosystems like Douglas Ewart's *Crepuscule*.

Crepuscule—named in intentional echo of the title of Monk’s great love song, “Crepuscule with Nellie”—is a carnival that Ewart periodically calls into being in places from Paris to Chicago to Guelph. It aims to expand the vocabulary of human interaction by bringing diverse groups not to reason together, as the Bible verse suggests, but to echolocate together: to unleash improvisatory reasoning, performance, and knowledge.

Ewart has explained that, in conceiving *Crepuscule*, “I wanted to bring together diverse people and communities . . . in a massive and organized improvisation. I wanted to develop a work that required sustained and deep interactions and dialogues over days, weeks, months, and years. I wanted to use every conceivable discipline/human practice as metaphors and coagulants . . . to accelerate understanding and change how we as humans view, perceive, and treat each other.”¹

Ewart is attempting to create know-how (the Guelph *Crepuscule*, for example, was preceded by an instrument-building workshop) that might spread echolocating techniques and sensibility beyond his carnivals, into the communities to which *Crepuscule* alumni return.

Simon Waters, remarking on “practice-based activities,” illuminates some of the ways in which this might work: “In practice-based activities . . . meaning emerges through participation. . . . To paraphrase Jonathan Impett . . . knowledge produced through art is always processual and performative—it needs to be constantly engaged with to sustain its emergent truths.”² A bat must sustain its crying out to guide its flight. A *Crepuscule* must be repeated, whether in a memory or a technique or a phone call between alumni or a new staging of the full event.

In a *Crepuscule*, one hears cultures echo against each other in the air, for each *Crepuscule* consists of simultaneous improvisations by diverse “pods” of people on a mission to create.³ The whole Ewart carnival ends up speaking a crepuscular tongue, like people who wake up speaking a language they have never studied. The 2016 *Crepuscule* in the Arboretum in Guelph, for instance, included, at one extreme, an Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) pod. (The AACM is Ewart’s tribe, founded by legendary musicians who nurtured him as a student and watched him rise to the office of AACM president from 1979 to 1986.)

Another pod consisted of spoken word poets; a third was led by the Guelph GoGo Grandmothers; yet another improvised under the name Mino Ode Kwewak N’Gamowak (Good Hearted Women Singers)—“a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women following the drum circle teachings of Community Elder Jean Becker.”⁴ So, musicianship mixed with elder and indigenous activism and the spoken word, and all that and much else bloomed in the Guelph afternoon and brought twilight down in style. The reverberations will continue in the participants’ memory of having built something together—a work of art the size of a town—and in the questions (musical and otherwise)—that a *Crepuscule* raises: how did we do that? How can we do it again? How can we get more people involved? What did, and what might we in the future, echolocate with our improvisations?⁵

2.

Back in 2004, I attended a *Crepuscule* in Chicago’s Washington Park. What stays with me about it is the memory of interwoven circles of music, poetry, and dance: African, Chinese, and Taiko drumming pods, a gospel pod’s far-carrying voices, the farther-carrying cries of Dixieland horns, the circle of sound a belly dancer shook from bells around her waist, the military clacks of an aikido pod’s staffs, and, like rests, the silent slow ritual throws of a capoeira pod. The whole was serendipitously joined from above by the honking of geese and, from behind, by the wind, tracing its brushstrokes on the face of a pond. Nature seemed to fleetingly sign off on the human, for all that the human does to drive nature away.

In a city as violent as Chicago can be, this *Crepuscule*, geese and all, was like a Muezzin calling to the city’s sometimes mutually antagonistic neighborhoods, saying, *here, as the earth spins toward sunset, is a chance to rethink night and the day that follows.*

Chicago for the most part did not hear the cry, and has not heard its successors, but that only means that works like *Crepuscule* have to continue setting their example of discovering alternative echo-locales, and alternative ways of doing and hearing things. And this vast project is something that can start small, as when, Ewart finds, he learns something new from a person who picks up an instrument he might have made and starts playing it the “wrong” way. Ewart finds his own

technique and vision bouncing back to him in irritating but eye-opening form. Similarly, the bigger ideas behind *Crepuscule* likely bounce back, altered, distorted, but perhaps reinvigorated: echoes becoming new locations, like errant expressions becoming new locutions. Indeed, the people who get involved in a *Crepuscule* are people Ewart says he learns from and who learn from him “in spite of my shortcomings—and their shortcomings.”⁶ That is one of the reasons for the use of echolocation: to hear beyond the horizon of one’s shortcomings, to privilege the unknown, to acknowledge that all we can grasp are echoes of what we seek.

Here it must be emphasized that echolocation does not come naturally to humans as it does to bats and whales. For humans, echolocation is hard work. It is improviser’s work—work where the epiphany comes only after the construction of a massive edifice of preparation. As Ewart has noted, no improvisation can succeed without years of practice and discipline—years of learning what is possible for an instrument and for one’s own body and mind, years of learning where the door to the impossible might be. So, *Crepuscule*, though a vast improvisation that includes novices, is deeply thought out, like an artwork by Christo.⁷ To pull it off, Ewart has to turn the creativity and mutual understanding hidden in people into one of his raw materials.

To that end, he seeds *Crepuscules* with instruments of his own design that both novices and master musicians can use. The instrument that for me most epitomizes the way this works is the “Crepuscular Stamping Stick”—a crutch that, fitted with bells, can make thumping, shimmering sounds. Ewart calls such instruments “crepuscular,” because they are made from materials in the twilight of their original purpose. The message here is multilayered, suggesting as it does a way of saving the environment by the resurrections of dead things rather than the erections of garbage dumps, and, suggesting too, that there is a way to free oneself (if only for the duration of a *Crepuscule*) from the psychological crutches we all lean on at one time or another. As a *Crepuscule* binds pods and people into a collective exploration, the sounds of the pods and the cultures they represent veer in the ear. The collection of pods are guided, not just by sound, but by sound shaped by the things it touches: sound that is not like a dictator’s command but like the trembling of the drum in a seeker’s echoing ear.

In sum, to whale echolocation and bat echolocation, we must add crepuscular echolocation: the location of paths through misunderstanding and misery, achieved by calls across communities and years, and by the resurrection of dead and discarded things.

Endnotes

- 1 Ewart, “Why Crepuscule 2015.”
- 2 Waters, “Contribution Toward an Ethics of Listening,” 2.
- 3 Ewart chose the name “pod,” he says, “because of my love and high regard for whales [and their close-knit pods], and because some of the groups are not properly defined by the name ‘group’ or ‘ensembles’...” (Author interview with Ewart.)
- 4 From the “About Us” page of the Mino Ode Kwewak N’Gamowak (Good Hearted Women Singers) web page.
- 5 Successful echolocations create echo-locales: scales, Jelly Roll riffs, beats, forms, techniques. Language itself has echoing—iterability, Derrida calls it—at its heart.
- 6 International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation, “Douglas R. Ewart.”
- 7 Ewart’s preparations include contracting “individuals, ensembles and established practitioners of various disciplines,” holding workshops, and answering the calls of would-be participants and sponsors. (Author interview with Ewart.)

Works Cited

- Ewart, Douglas R. “Why Crepuscule 2015.” <http://improvisationinstitute.ca/news/why-crepuscule--2015>
- International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation. “Douglas R. Ewart (IIR 2015) & Community Orchestra Inventions: Crepuscule.” <https://vimeo.com/171646665>
- Waters, Simon. “Contribution Toward an Ethics of Listening: An Improvising Musician’s Perspective.” *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* 12, no. 1 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.21083/csieci.v12i1.3752>

Crepuscule was TOPS!
-Adam Tinkle

| JEANNETTE HICKS & BRIAN LEFRESNE

COLLABORATIVE ASSEMBLAGE, ACTIVISM, AND THE IMPROVISATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Jeannette Hicks and Brian Lefresne are research assistants with the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI). From 2015–2016, they were Douglas R. Ewart’s studio assistants during the preparation of Crepuscule. The following essay derives from their recollections of instrument building with Douglas, and an email interview among the three of them.

| 45

OUR HANDS ARE ALREADY FULL OF METAL OBJECTS WHEN WE FIND THE bundt pan. Avocado green and scalloped around the edges, it exudes '70s homey charm. Douglas picks it up and strikes it with a piece of wood, just as he has with all the others. The sound that emerges is cosmic—rich and low—spreading in a circle from our hearts to the fringes of our fingers and beyond: a sound stronger than itself.

We’ve been walking around all day looking for cast off metal objects in salvage yards and thrift stores, lifting them up, cradling them in our hands, and sounding them to extract their little bit of wonder. Some gleaming objects that look initially promising are surprisingly flat and dull to the ear. And some, like this bundt pan, are cosmic. Once we’ve gathered our objects, we’ll take them back to Diyode—the Guelph makerspace we’re sharing this month with other local tinkerers—and bolt them to a pair of downhill skis to make musical instruments. Along with some crutches we’ve strung with bells and carefully wrapped with

colourful cords, rain sticks made of fabric tubes and corn, and sonic tops made of anything we can drill a hole through, these instruments will be part of *Crepuscule* (pronounced kre'-pu-skewl), a recurring series of collective community improvisations orchestrated by musician, visual artist, educator, and instrument-builder Douglas R. Ewart.

Crepuscule is, in a sense, a giant improvised assemblage of people, sounds, and materials coming together to imagine new ways of living together in community. It is a structure that brings people together from across potential boundaries of experience, culture, class, gender, ethnicity, age, and ability in a large-scale collective improvisation, using both traditional instruments and art forms, and instruments assembled from skis, crutches, bells, and other found objects. And so, on the occasion of *Crepuscule*'s 2018 return to Guelph and Waterloo, we'd like to reflect on the process and politics of making.

Assemblage

46 |

When we find an object, Douglas lifts it up and turns it over in his hands, assessing the skill that went into making it. He's got an eye for high-quality work, honed by years of making and his early apprenticeship as a tailor. Douglas has been making instruments since he was a child in Jamaica in the 1950s, when he began experimenting with constructing percussion instruments out of tin cans and car and truck parts.¹ Douglas's practice of building instruments is rooted in the rich craft tradition that surrounded him as a child in Jamaica. As Douglas comments,

I grew up in a culture in which people made a lot of the items they utilized on a daily basis. [...] So, the idea of building things was endemic to my paradigm, mindset, and way of being. [...] Being monetarily disenfranchised compels people to be frugal in how all things were utilized and disposed of [...] People did not throw most things away. The items were well made and were repaired, rather than discarded if something got broken or worn.²

Douglas's interest in making instruments was further nourished when he moved to Chicago in the mid '60s and joined the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), a Black artistic

collective founded on the South Side of Chicago in 1965 and dedicated to the promotion of original music, pedagogy, and community collaborations.³

From the beginning, the AACM has been defined by an improvisatory ethos and an environment of "cross-disciplinary ferment,"⁴ creating compositional structures and spaces to nurture creative freedom. Many AACM artists, in addition to making music, create paintings, masks, costumes, graphic scores, and performance art. Alongside these musical and intermedia artistic projects, there exists within the group, in curator Dieter Roelstraete's words, an "enthusiasm for purpose-built instruments."⁵

After joining the AACM, Douglas returned to making musical instruments out of both curiosity and necessity. Douglas's desire to create new sonic instruments was partly borne out of the systematic inequalities that capitalism produces, which fall along both racial and class lines, but also out of an urge to create. When asked about his use of found objects, he elaborates that the use of disinherited objects stimulates his own creative desires and presents new challenges. At a more practical level, working with discarded objects allows him to acquire "materials at a relatively reasonable cost most of the time."⁶

Many commentators have situated the AACM practice of building instruments out of found objects within a larger concern with the relations between art and life—whether as part of an improvisatory strategy adopted within many Black diasporic cultures in response to poverty, oppression, and migration;⁷ as a continuation of the historical avant-gardist attempt to merge art and life;⁸ or in the context of the Black Arts Movement's exploration of the questions of how Black life can produce Black art, and conversely, how Black art can transform Black life.⁹ For Douglas, the practice of making instruments out of found objects is part of a reimagination of the relations between art and life, an experiment in living together differently on this earth.

The Politics of Making

As much as *Crepuscule* is about building community and sharing, the gathering of bodies in a communal space also reminds us that we all live on the same planet. An ecological concern and a critique of

| 47



consumer culture undergirds Douglas's practice of making instruments. As Douglas recounts,

We often discard items that require enormous time, skill, and diligence to construct but, due to mass-production and low wages for the workers, we are able to purchase them below market value and so we become complacent and reckless in how we treat these items.¹⁰

Commodities such as our bundt pan are not disconnected from our planet's ecological and economic systems, but are products of the synthesis of environmental resources and the exploitation of labour. Society's demand for new, maybe more stylish, maybe more contemporary-looking tools and accessories forces the systems of capitalism to accelerate the extraction of, expenditure of, and damage to the earth's resources, as well as the exploitation of labour to produce the newest model of bundt pan. The excessive production of commodities, in addition to inflicting damage upon our planet, is indicative of larger trends of deregulation, free-trade, and speculative economics that exploit the workers who toil in the plants that manufacture these objects.

| 49

During a gathering of IICSI's *Thinking Spaces: The Improvisation Reading Group and Speaker Series* at Silence, Douglas put on a short display of his sonic tops. While clearing the floor to make space for the tops, an object—which we can no longer recall—broke. Examining the unrememberable object, Douglas immediately responded “punk-ass construction.” Both our inability to recall the object and Douglas's dismissal of the quality of workmanship put into this object reinforce the extent to which the rapid production and demand for material goods leaves us with flimsy and sub-par objects.

Douglas does not craft *Crepuscule's* sonic artefacts from raw materials; he instead constructs his “crepuscular instruments” from pre-existing objects “in the twilight of their original intent and purpose.”¹¹ In choosing to work with the flotsam and jetsam of consumer culture, Douglas brings a social and environmental dimension to *Crepuscule*. When Douglas scours thrift stores or scrap yards searching for materials to build the sound tools for *Crepuscule*, he refuses capitalism's ethos of excess while also demonstrating, in his words, a “deep regard for the Earth.”

◀ Instrument building with Douglas R. Ewart at Guelph's Diyode community workshop.

Crepuscule not only brings communities together, but also provides a moment where we encounter material reminders of how to resist the effects of *slow violence*—the way resource extraction, pollution, and manufacturing impact the environment of the global non-majority.¹² Opting to use pre-existing objects in his instruments, Douglas calls attention to the ways we inflict damage upon our planet.

In refusing capitalism's tropes of accumulation and acquisition, Douglas also combats what he calls the "false affluence" of the material world—the ideology that if we can afford an object then we are justified in acquiring it.¹³ Yet, as he points out, just because one can afford to buy something doesn't mean the environment can, or that the people who will be exploited to produce it can.

Being creative with materials is an improvisatory strategy for surviving and flourishing in response to social and economic inequality. As Rob Nixon points out, environmental activists in poor communities can "seldom afford to be single-issue activists."¹⁴ Rather, community alliances and struggles for environmental justice are inextricably linked with critiques of "other economical and cultural causes."¹⁵ When environmental activists call attention to the plight of landlessness in Jamaica, the continued use of outdated coal-burning power plants in southwest Chicago, or the inadequate weatherization of low-income housing in the greater Minneapolis area, they are also signalling the ways the material, biological, and temporal facets of capitalism are intertwined with issues of environmental (in)justice.

The craft of extending the use-value of material goods by converting them into musical instruments directly addresses the dual concerns of capitalism and ecological damage. Many discarded consumer goods could have another life. For example, as Douglas points out, crutches are durable, adjustable, and well-crafted items. Yet in our throw-away culture they are often discarded after they've helped their owner heal. Nonetheless, their durability makes them perfect for many other uses—as musical instruments, frames, plant stabilizers, and more.¹⁶

Craft is a crucial part of Douglas's work, part of an ethos of respect for the person who made the objects we incorporate, for the person who will enjoy the piece it will become, and for the environment. As we assemble the instruments, we inspect their structural integrity, tightening bolts on skis and re-knotting cords on crutches to make sure



the instruments will function well and be a source of "pride, joy, and inspiration" not only for us, their makers, but for those who will play them as well.¹⁷

Making things ourselves is empowering, a playful way to speak back to material culture and contest the imperative to consume. Fastening an eggbeater to the side of one of the ski instruments, we can't help laughing at its delightful absurdity. As Douglas points out, the practice of making can "augment the imagination" and help develop capacities of "self-confidence, mental and manual dexterity, self-determination."¹⁸ In a culture that encourages passive consumption, making things ourselves can help us to reclaim some agency in relation to the material world.

Seen in this way, Douglas's crepuscular creations are more than sonic-theatrical devices in a larger social-eco-critical project, or simply another entry into the AACM's larger history of instrument building. These objects are interventions in material culture, and material reminders of some ways we can resist the processes and ideologies that divide and harm us.

Using found objects and making things ourselves involves taking up a different relation to capitalism, the environment, and other people.



As Douglas comments, this makerly ethos is part of “how we must live if we are to display—to manifest—our deep regard for the Earth” and for each other.¹⁹

Collaboration

Back in the studio, the process of making takes on a carnivalesque dimension. Children passing through with their parents paint sonic tops and send them spinning around the floor. Our studio mates stop by to jam on the instruments, bat around ideas, and lend a hand. In workshops at kw Habilitation and Musagetes, Douglas—together with people of all ages and abilities—crafts percussion shakers and rain sticks using corn, chicken wire, and fabric tubes. Everyone plays improvised music together.

Whether in the studio, in workshops, or in performance, Douglas often shares the creative process with others, whether experienced or first-time makers, and across many axes of difference. Douglas’s commitment to collaboration across difference is guided by an egalitarian belief that no matter who we are, we can all learn something from each other. In his words,

We all have experiences, varying levels of knowledge, wisdom, and no matter how well exposed and versed we may be, we can learn

▲ LEFT Douglas R. Ewart and the authors at an instrument-building workshop in Guelph.
▼ RIGHT Douglas R. Ewart and participants from KW Habilitation at an instrument-building workshop in Waterloo.



from each other, and no matter how expansive or limited the experiences may be we have something to offer each other.²⁰

Douglas’s approach to making is guided by an ethos of non-hierarchical co-creation and skill-sharing. Assemblage involves creating something larger than the sum of its parts, as we are when we come together in community. When everyone’s contribution is welcome, we can all learn from each other, and grow as a result.

When approached in an egalitarian manner, making things with others also makes use of the same capacities as musical improvisation—trust, respect for the skills and ideas of others, and openness to new ideas and methods.²¹ It forces us to suspend our egos, truly listen to one another, and abandon old approaches where needed. As Douglas comments, “when we make things together we must value our collaborators’ ideas, opinions, acumen, and perspective. Otherwise, it is not a real collaboration.”²² Yet true collaboration is not passive resignation to what other people want, but an active dialogue across difference. Making things with others invites us to enter into a call and response with materials, space, and other people in which we are active yet receptive. Co-creation does not mean that we must abandon our beliefs to achieve consensus, nor does it mean we must be impervious to constructive criticism. As Douglas points out, “we must sometimes do things by consensus and be able to offer an idea and stand by it even



when the group rejects it. Standing alone is crucial because the majority can and have been wrong on numerous occasions.”²³

Dissonance and the expression of dissent are important parts of collaboration. As Ajay Heble observes, sounds that initially seem “out of tune” can challenge the sensory, conceptual, and political norms of experience.²⁴ When our expectations are challenged, we can become aware of norms we didn’t realize were in play. In this moment in which the norms that formerly governed our lives begin to shimmer and destabilize, new possibilities can emerge—possibilities that would not have come into being without the contributions of previously excluded people.

Collaborative assemblage is not only an object-oriented practice aimed at producing artefacts for aesthetic contemplation, or instruments that invite musical improvisation after their creation. The process of collaborative assemblage is itself an act of improvisation—a way of working with the contingencies of everyday existence to collectively imagine new relations with this earth, and with each other. It is an experiment in collective self-determination. As Douglas says, improvisation is a “way of life.”²⁵

| 55

Postscript

The bundt pan (pictured left) never quite made it into *Crepuscule* in 2016. Despite our hopes, it dangled at the end of the project, one of those loose ends that never quite gets woven into the whole. But the improvisation of everyday life is an ongoing process, a part of the continuing work of refashioning our shared world into a more just and equitable one. So, after everyone had gone home and all the instruments had been packed away, we returned to the shop to give the bundt pan new life at the top of a tall staff, a gathering point around which to assemble anew and improvise together. In the fall of 2018, we did. The process continues...

Endnotes

- 1 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 2 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 3 For more on the history and aesthetics of the AACM see George E. Lewis,

A Power Stronger Than Itself. A short biography of Douglas R. Ewart is included on pages 277–281.

- 4 Foreword, *The Freedom Principle*, 9.
- 5 Roelstraete, “The Way Ahead,” 26.
- 6 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 7 For example, George Lewis describes the Great Migration as one big collective improvisation. As millions of African Americans migrated from the rural south to the industrial north over the course of the twentieth century, an “experimentalist generation of ordinary working-class African Americans” (Lewis, “Collaborative Improvisation,” 44) struggled to collectively imagine new ways of surviving and flourishing in northern industrial cities, embracing processes of assemblage, “mediation and remediation, bricolage and improvisation” (Lewis, “Expressive Awesomeness,” 118). See also: Beckwith, “Only Poetry,” 51.
- 8 Roelstraete, “The Way Ahead,” 25.
- 9 Beckwith, “Only Poetry,” 42. See also Rebecca Zorach on instrument-building and the primacy of the performative in the Black Arts Movement. Zorach argues that AACM instrument-building practices should be understood as “part of an artful approach to living: performative, rather than object-focused” (Zorach, “The Positive Aesthetics,” 101).
- 10 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 11 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 12 Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2.
- 13 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 14 Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 4.
- 15 Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 4.
- 16 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 17 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 18 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 19 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 20 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.
- 21 Douglas R. Ewart. Personal correspondence. July 10, 2018.
- 22 Douglas R. Ewart. Personal correspondence. July 10, 2018.
- 23 Douglas R. Ewart. Personal correspondence. July 10, 2018.
- 24 Heble, *Landing on the Wrong Note*, 9.
- 24 Douglas R. Ewart, personal correspondence, July 10, 2018.

56 |

Contemporary Art Chicago in association with the U of Chicago P, 2015.

- Heble, Ajay. *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Lewis, George. “Collaborative Improvisation as Critical Pedagogy.” In “Black Collectivities,” edited by Huey Copeland and Naomi Beckwith. Special issue, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 34 (Spring 2014): 40–47.
- . “Expressive Awesomeness.” In *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music 1965 to Now*, 114–127. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with U of Chicago P, 2015.
- . *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011.
- Roelstraete, Dieter. “The Way Ahead: The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians and Chicago’s Black Arts Revolution.” In *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music 1965 to Now*, 19–30. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with U of Chicago P, 2015.
- Zorach, Rebecca. “The Positive Aesthetics of the Black Arts Movement.” In *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music 1965 to Now*, 94–107. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with U of Chicago P, 2015.

| 57

Works Cited

Beckwith, Naomi. “Only Poetry.” In *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music 1965 to Now*, 39–51. Chicago: Museum of

© 2018

Douglas R. Ewart's Crepuscule: Stories of Impact

Edited by Ajay Heble.

Published by the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation
and PS Guelph.

ISBN 978-1-989157-04-6

Design: Kathe Gray
Printed and bound by PS Guelph

Photographer credits: Richelle Forsey vi, x, 11–16, 20–21, 24, 28, 38, 51–53;
João França 19 (video screen capture); Jackson Klie 54; Brian Lefresne 48; Darin White 33–37.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada



The Improviser-in-Residence Program is a collaboration between the International
Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI) and Musagetes.

This book has been published in conjunction with an exhibit held at the
Robert Langen Art Gallery, Wilfrid Laurier University,
75 University Ave W., Waterloo, Ontario
from August 27–October 5, 2018
and 10C, 42 Carden St., Guelph, Ontario
from September 13–15, 2018.

International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation
www.improvisationinstitute.ca

The International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation is a partnered research
institute comprised of 56 scholars from 20 different institutions, hosted at the University
of Guelph, with project sites at McGill University, Memorial University of Newfoundland,
University of Regina, University of British Columbia, and University of California – Santa
Barbara. The Institute's mandate is to create positive social change through the confluence
of improvisational arts, innovative scholarship, and collaborative action.

Musagetes
www.musagetes.ca

Musagetes is an international organization that makes the arts more central
and meaningful in people's lives, in our communities, and in our societies.
Our programming takes place in Guelph, Lecce (Italy), and Rijeka (Croatia), as well as
through our online platform:
www.artseverywhere.ca.



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL STUDIES IN IMPROVISATION

PS GUELPH