



**ALEX WARD/TIM HILL/
DOMINIC LASH/MARK SANDERS:
PREDICATE
(FMRC318-0811)**

TIM HILL: alto and baritone saxophones
ALEX WARD: electric guitar
DOMINIC LASH: double bass
MARK SANDERS: drums

TRACKLISTINGS

1. The Denied (5:12)
 2. Courtesy Class (9:01)
 3. Stub (8:58)
 4. Happy New Year (6:48)
 5. Forecast (14:49)
 6. Candidates (7:23)
- Total time: 52:08

The pieces on this CD were written between October 2009 and March 2010 specifically for this group, which played its first show in February 2010. Even though the majority of my available recordings are of free improvisation, the challenge of composing for improvising musicians and/or creating music where composed and improvised elements coexist interdependently has long been one of my foremost concerns - but it's only recently that I've felt ready to put together a working band for this purpose and make the results public. I have always believed that for such a combination of methodologies to be worthwhile, any composed material should be as strongly characterised as the improvising. Otherwise, the incorporation of composition would signify nothing more than a reluctance for the music to be fully improvised, a capitulation to the notion of improvisation as insufficient to generate music by itself - which, as one might suspect from my prior history (and in particular the key role of Derek Bailey in my musical development), I do not believe to any extent. Therefore, I had first to learn how (and why) to compose music that aspired to stand on its own merits, before addressing the specific issue of composing for improvisers. This was a lengthy process, moving through several phases, principally:

- 1) several years of collaborative work with Benjamin Hervé, mainly in the rock band Camp Blackfoot (represented on the 1999 album "Critical Seed vs. The Spartan Society");
- 2) a period of songwriting, represented by the 2005 album "Hapless Days" and subsequent work with the band Alex Ward & The Dead Ends - which, while in some ways constituting a diversion from the technical/aesthetic considerations involved in writing instrumental music, clarified for me how I perceive material and could incorporate psychological/ emotional resonances in a compositional context; and
- 3) the writing of through-composed instrumental structures for a duo line-up of guitar and drums, which became the basis for the repertoire of the band Dead Days Beyond Help (formed late 2006). These pieces were collected on the album "Access Denied!" (released 2009).

Dead Days Beyond Help marks the point where I felt I'd reached a level of clarity and sureness in my approach to composition, and in its initial stage also represented a summary of everything I'd been working on up to that point, incorporating as it does in its live performances songs, free improvisation and the aforementioned through-composed instrumental pieces. In mid-2009 however, DDBH underwent a transformation, shifting towards a fully collaborative method of composition, and now the material for the band is written jointly by myself and drummer Jem Doulton. At that point, I started to feel it was time to establish some new compositional outlets, firstly to provide a vehicle for the solo composing I was no longer doing for DDBH, secondly to test whether my new-found confidence in writing music could extend to other formats and instrumentations, and thirdly to confront at last the issue of combining composition with improvisation (DDBH deals in both, but very seldom together in any given piece). Predicate is the first band to be formed with >>>>>



>>>>> these aims> in mind.

In putting together Predicate and assessing how composition and improvisation might interact in the band's music, I was guided initially by a conception of my own performance role. Having found myself playing more and more guitar over the preceding few years, both with DDBH and in the improvising trio N.E.W. (with Steve Noble and John Edwards), I felt that some aspects of how I approach the instrument might be interestingly applied in a more linear and less stylistically volatile context than either of those bands tend towards. This idea informed both the compositions I would write for the group and my choice of instrumentation – one which offers a clear delineation of rhythm section (double bass and drums) and lead instrument (saxophone), allowing the guitar to sit in between. This certain traditionalism of format, combined with a willingness for the music to gravitate towards a high level of propulsive energy and intensity, has led me on occasion to refer to Predicate as my “free-jazz” group – but this is really no more than a fairly abstract aesthetic touchstone, and while there may be less moment-to-moment dislocation than in much of the music I've been involved in previously, the group's improvisations have tended to be equally stylistically unbounded, to my great satisfaction.

Which brings me to the members of the group... After everything I might say about my ideas and aims, the character and quality of the music ultimately depends on the players, and in that regard I could not have been more fortunate. I thought long and hard about which musicians would be right for this band – and yet once I'd arrived at the final decision of who to ask, it seemed so perfect that there could have been no other choices, and I'm enormously grateful that they all agreed to be involved. If one composes to have one's intentions realised, one works with improvisers to find oneself in areas that go beyond anything one could have intended – and Tim, Mark and Dominic are the type of musicians who can fulfill both of those wishes at once. I've known Tim Hill for close to twenty years, and owe an enormous amount of my understanding of how to combine composition and improvisation to my experiences in various of his own groups. As a saxophonist, he has the rare ability to play simultaneously with emotion and momentum - that distinctive combination of attack and poignancy that characterises my very favourite jazz soloists. Besides his power and inventiveness as a bassist, Dominic Lash embodies for me the best qualities of a new generation of improvising musicians – an informed understanding of a huge range of technical and instrumental possibilities, a sense of one's connectedness to tradition(s) being potentially strengthening rather than deadening, and an ability to cater to the musical demands of any given situation without suppressing his own personality or instincts in the process. And Mark Sanders is a man whose résumé speaks for the astonishing scope of his musical conception and ability: from any species of metrical groove, through the multi-directional all-time/no-time of free-jazz, to pure textural exploration of the kit's sonic potential, he has not only mastered all the above but made them his own – and also possesses a readiness to engage with notated music unusual in someone with such a breadth of improvisational resource. It has been a joy and an inspiration playing with these musicians and experiencing the ways they have been able to transform the material I brought to the group, and my heartfelt thanks go to all of them.

It is my hope to write many more pieces for this quartet, and to work with it for much time to come. We hope you enjoy this first instalment of our music.

Alex Ward, April 2011

All compositions by
Alex Ward (PRS)
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by Ash Gardner at
House Of Strange Studios.
Mixed and mastered by
Alex Ward.
Produced for FMR
by Trevor Taylor
Layout by Ewan Rigg

