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signal to noise

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gang of four
joe mcphée
the dead c.
rob mazurek
lawrence english in china
magik markers
xiu xiu
james finn
christopher o'riley
kyle bruckmann



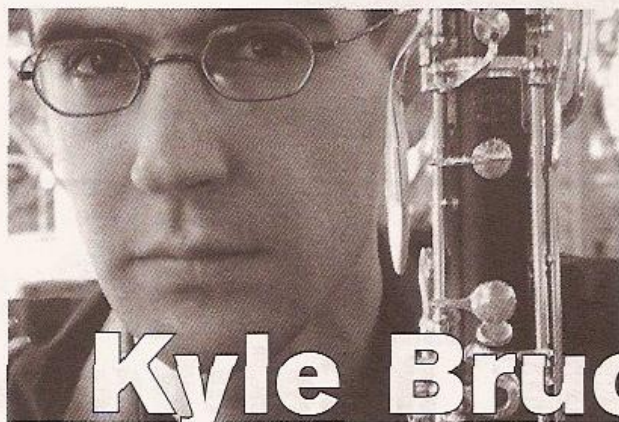
Kyle Bruckmann protests, "Dammit, I need to go to sleep." It's a wonder how he manages to slip in the odd moment of sleep amid his furious schlep of a schedule, which takes in three or five or six touring bands, auditions, orchestral performances high and low, teaching the oboe and English horn, composing, recording, arranging, practicing, making the scene, schmoozing, and all the other undignified, essential craziness that musicians must undertake just to keep the rest of us from asphyxiating for lack of the iron lung of Art.

Bruckmann came up in Danbury, Connecticut (also Charles Ives' hometown), but spent his undergradateship in Houston at Rice University, booking his passage into the noise economy: "College radio. Saved my life. Landed me with a funny haricot in 9th grade, introduced me to everything in I knew outside of youth orchestra, seduced me away from the practice room all through college." Graduate work in Ann Arbor and matriculation into the fervent mid-90's Chicago scene completed the voyage. Consequently, an encyclopedic recall of advanced noise-music articulates from the fingers, lips, and pen of Bruckmann; he prefers concealing himself in squid-inkings of black humor and wry misdirection. Likewise his music tends to be studiously mordant and spread thick with irony and wit. "It's not supposed to work like this!" someone screams in one of his songs. But it does work more often than not, in spite of its own spite.

Having in 2003 flown the Chicago coop for the Bay Area's enfolding nest, busy Mr. Bruckmann keeps his Midwestern connections crackling with projects like LOZENGE, an ever-collapsing/reconstructing site of U-name-it-core in which he triages on keyboards and other implements and comes up with catchy nihilist singalong ditties, joined by ex-Texas mates Kurt Johnson (bass), Mark Stevens (percussion), and Philip Montoro (scrapmetal, tools and stuff). LOZENGE sonically straddles the crossroads of trance and cacophony. Bruckmann muses about their knotty progress: "The boys have always augmented, unlearned, and sabotaged the parts I handed them, inevitably resulting in something far more twisted and brilliant than I'd initially conceived. The process got progressively more fuzzy

and collaborative through the years, with more and more improvisation and inevitable failure built into the system." The boys wear a cheerful face of mid-western optimism by which they dispense their mayhem; LOZENGE makes you grin as you clear the metal shavings out of your ears, as your body's borne out of the hall on the beat of a thousand air-raid sirens.

The opening fusillade on their newest release *Undone* (Sickroom Records), titled "Gobbets of Raw", commences with dismembered organ and bass whacking on one rhythm like a sick mockingbird giving lurching head to a radioactive frog; pretty soon the black bleak gets lit up with redglare of klan-gorous metal rhythms in another county; there's a stumblebum unison break, then



Kyle Bruckmann

another game-leg groove hops away down a subway tunnel. The organ sounds desperate; a screaming fills the sky, punctuated by cruel shrapnel. The whole Crystal Palace craters, and out of it, the punchline of a carnival nickelodeon gaily announces another fire drill for the apocalypse. Everything from This Heat to Bosh to Xenakis to the Flying Luttenbackers to Cheer-Accident gets skinned and refried in the process — which is to say, it's raucous as hell and a helluva lot of fun. Rumors fly of a LOZENGE tour in fall '05.

Bruckmann has a couple of "chamber" projects snaking their way into your ears. EKG is an electroacoustic duo with trumpeter Ernst Karel; both of them bring analog electronics on board in addition to their wind instruments to create a sparse, unsettling world of glints, tinsel, silences, singularities. Spring 2005 saw them touring the East Coast with Dean Roberts and Giuseppe Ielasi. EKG's second album, *No Sign*

(Sedimental), is brand new, too. Then there's Wrack, another Chicago-based group, a quintet dedicated to Bruckmann's post-Stravinsky / Bartok / Messaien / Webern composing. Their eponymously titled first recording on Red Toucan featured, besides Bruckmann on double-reeds, trombonist Jeb Bishop, Jen Paulson, viola, Kurt Johnson, bass and Tim Daisy behind the drumkit. The music is angular, off-kilter, and obsessive. It won't leave you alone with its worrying beats and long, mournful melodic yarns. A new recording is in the can. Besides these longstanding enterprises, Bruckmann's undertaken West Coast-based ventures with such as Sam Coomes, John Shiurba, Gino Robair, and Scott Rosenberg (a somewhere left-of-rock band called Pink

Mountain) and this past summer mounted, with Aurora Jacobson and Jacob Lindsay, a packed-house concert dedicated to the music of Charles Ives featuring numerous Bay Area luminaries.

"Why do I do music for a living?" says Bruckman, "I ask myself that one nearly every day. It has something to do with harm reduction, I think — a suspicion that nearly any other method of participating in the economy I could think of (and pull off) would make the world more of a worse place than I'm making it by peddling sounds." He continues: "This music is play: discipline applied towards shared experience, creating direct communication by, for, and within a community (however puny and insular it may be) — but otherwise ostensibly worthless, at least from a market perspective. The simple process of working hard without a good "reason" provides fascinating insights into consciousness, what it means to be human."

Tom Dill