

STUART SAUNDERS SMITH

New England

Berndt Thurner

WDR

• THE COLOGNE
• BROADCASTS

KAIROS

STUART SAUNDERS SMITH (*1948)

New England

1	I	05:21
2	II	10:09
3	III	06:28
4	IV	04:59
5	V	04:03
6	VI	03:31
7	VII	03:20
8	VIII	03:35
9	IX	04:48
10	X	02:58
11	XI	02:30

TT 51:45

Berndt Thurner *vibraphone*

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(De Profundis V, 2010)





Reflections on Paths traveled

Composing, thoughts

I am in a subtropical paradise. There is a plethora of flowering plants of all colors imaginable, a warm steady breeze, sea water with azure blue, waterfalls of fresh spring water, and citrus fruits off the tress.

.

Yet,

I crave art.

Art is *much* better than nature.

.

At the very center of art is tragedy,
which is sorrow seen
in the mirror the knowing eyes of death.

.

Nature does not speak to humane condition,
only art does.

.

.

.

.

.

I am in nature

trying to be out of nature – way out.

Give me the music over flowers.

When the mind
parts from the body
into two separate beings –
that is the day of arrival – the beginning of wisdom.
The separation stimulates a conversation
between body and mind;
and allows us to experience mortality
rather than immortality.

.
. .
. .
. .
. .

Much of the world musical cultures
create a music of reconciliation –
trying to heal the “rift”
between body and mind.

This music is largely trance music.

I want music that separates mind and body to such an extent
that it creates a dissociative state
which enriches
two
rather than making a
one

God was talking
to his best friend
before He made the universe.
How friend asked,

.
“are you going to use directions?”
“No, no directions,
just expanding.”

It's the act of writing
that something is written.

.

.

It is the movement of the pen.

.

Music
is in the pen

Stuart Saunders Smith
(from the "modern percussion revolution –
journeys of the progressive artist";
Routledge, New York, London)

New England is the collection of states in the extreme northeast of the United States. Since the formation of the country, it has been a place of intellectual ferment: Thoreau, Emerson, Dickinson – all form much of the intellectual foundation of the American experiment. Charles Ives comes directly from this worldview. A worldview that holds that each detail of life, and of nature, expresses the whole.

I see all things as a manifestation of light – each one a center, each one an infinite universe. Everything is both one thing, and, a particular thing. Ironically, it is a momentary loss of self, where we find the true nature of our authentic self – both one and all.

New England is for solo-vibraphone, and is a meditation and continuance of this region's transcendentalist roots. Of the vibraphone five concert cycle *The Night Suite*, *New England* is the Tuesday night.

The vibraphone, in the end, is a bland instrument, without much coloristic value. It is like an empty piece of paper – blank. And this is precisely why I have composed hours and hours of vibraphone music. My music is a diary that I have kept since 1970. The vibraphone is my home, my paper. You, the listener, are welcome here, to hear my soul, and in doing so, find your own soul.

*Stuart Saunders Smith,
December 2017*



Thoughts on “New England”

by Berndt Thurner

The first time I came into contact with Stuart’s music at the end of my studies was in a competition. A percussion opera played ... *and pointe north* for a performer. It is a composition in which the interpreter is invited not only to play percussion instruments, but also to sing, to speak, as well as to make acting claims on the percussionists.

A little later I interpreted and recorded Stuart’s first composition (*In common* for flute and vibraphone). Because of this recording, I met Stuart personally. It was followed by a continuous collaboration with numerous original performances, which we continue to this day.

From the beginning this music exerts a strong fascination on me, leaving a magical impression that I have not lost to this day.

This music has been with me for more than 25 years and become a passion.

The complexity of the music (especially the rhythm) ultimately leads to a resolution of the pulse. Different velocities of rhythms are perceived as relaxation, which as a whole again result in the tension/phrasing arc. It is a music that redefines itself within space and time.

Stuart composes without using any compositional systems. One note, one sound, gives the next. Where the journey will go is not foreseeable at the beginning of the compositional process. The lines go their own way; frequently they have the same starting point but go on different paths.

*Berndt Thurner,
January 2018*



The Night Suite

- 1st Night: "Plenty" in 34 movements
- 2nd Night: "New England" in 11 movements
- 3rd Night: "the deep" in 4 movements
- 4th Night: "my romance", "alone" (with soprano), two ballads
- 5th night: "commune" vibraphone + ensemble



Stuart Saunders Smith

I began composing when I was six. My first piece sandbox, was written for woodblock and cowbell with many whole rests between the sounds. I loved the looks of whole rests. My rests were not of the Cage variety; I simply loved counting to four.

My teacher was Charles Newcomb. A veteran Vaudeville musician, he could sight-read virtually everything. Some of his assignments for homework were to hand copy various percussion scores. These were my first composition lessons, along with lessons providing in many styles – Latin music, to waltz, to Dixieland – anything with drums. For me, music composition is physical thanks to Mr. Newcomb. Also, composition was seen as what a musician does: you perform, you compose.

I got my union card when I was thirteen as I began playing in clubs, dances, and the like. In my late teens I had an epiphany: The better we played, the less the club owner liked it. The audience was no problem. The

gate-keeper payed for dull music. We better play dull, or never get hired again.

One cannot teach composition. One supports the young composers, exposes them to a wide selection of literature, helps with notation, and move them on, by your example.

I studied composition in my twenties with Edward Diemente, Sal Matirano, Ben Johnston, and Herbert Brün. My work with Mr. Diemente was almost exclusively centered around notation and its relationship to performance practice. Also, Mr. Diemente and I “Co-directed” a new music ensemble. We would compose a piece one week and hear it the next. It was the composer’s ensemble. We also improvised in every rehearsal. My first lesson with Sal consisted of him staring at my score silently for about forty-five minutes. (He seemed a bit stoned.) Then out of the blue he said, “You want to play some jazz at my home?” I said sure. So we got my drum-set to his place. We rehearsed a couple nights a week – drums and piano. These sessions were my lessons with Sal. Then came Ben Johnston. I knocked at his studio door. I went in. There

was silence everywhere. He was in his rocking chair, staring out the window. I showed Ben the score I was working on. I played through it on his piano. He asked after I finished, "How did you make it?" I said, "I don't know. I worked it out by ear." There was a long wait. Finally he said, "well, we better not change that!" So went my lessons with Ben. I entered his room in silence. One of us would say something, more silence, and so forth. He did not say much. Ben watched. He watched me build rhythm by rhythm and interval by interval. He did not interfere. Not saying but doing, was his lesson. Later, Ben would read some of his essays for my comment. He performed these papers with great intensity or purpose and passion. Herbert Brün was brilliant. Herbert was a communist. He believed (oh, how he hated the word believe) that pitch and rhythm governments needed to be designed like he wanted civil governments. Herbert and I rarely agreed on much, even though I am an American version of a utopian communist. We wrestled with the purpose of music in society. I thought then, and I still do, that politics is thought, and art is not. Our argument was experience vs theory. (I am politically committed. My music could care less!)

My life in music is about letting things evolve, emerge, with experience the guide.

As I write this introduction, it occurs to me, that I have had and have, one more composition teacher, Sylvia Smith, the owner and editor of Sonic Art Editions and Smith Publications. She publishes all my music. She has known my music since 1968. I rely on Sylvia to comment on my latest works. I sometimes revise a composition if she suggests changes. Also, once in a great while, Sylvia suggests that a work does not work at all. It is rare that we disagree on this. When we do, I withhold the piece from performance, in order to see if I change my mind a year later or so.

It is important to always have a mentor; a big ego is useless. I am a worker, an art-worker. I go to work everyday. I listen, I notate my listening. My listening has evolved. My listening was greatly enhanced thanks to Edward Diemente, Sal Matirano, Ben Johnston, Herbert Grün, Charles Newcomb and Sylvia Smith. They are here, with me, one to another.

VIII.

27.

Spoken Voice

To write IN the Midst of so many, To write To The ones who Came

before, AND To write to the ones who will Come Next: Just Stand, Keep Moving, Towards their Faces, their Faces

of the oval light, Write to them, to them IN their midst.

New England (2011)
 © Smith Publications



Berndt Thurner

Born in Wolfsberg, Austria, Berndt Thurner is a drummer with unusual breadth and flexibility, who sees himself as a soloist as well as an ensemble member. His interest for performing complex notations and improvisation are closely related to his intense study of jazz and classical music. His passion for traveling to remote regions always brings him new musical inspiration and a constantly expanding range of instruments.

Berndt Thurner lives in Vienna and is a member of the ensemble PHACE – contemporary music.

For multiple years he has been working on the project *Night Suite* for solo vibraphone. These five evenings with unique vibraphone music were the result of intensive collaboration with the American composer Stuart Saunders Smith.

www.phace.at

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