

Four interviews with Uwe Schmidt, as published in [uzine] 1999-2002

(1/4) 1999-12 [uzine] presented the following question to some of the Ultra correspondents of the last 7 years: "What would be your most favorite work of art ever? (anything goes: movies, architecture, paintings, music, ...) Please digress." Here are the answers:

"2001" (Kubrick). Because it combines the most excellent visuals with the most excellent music and makes you think about philosophy at the same time. - Atom Heart

(2/4) An ultrashort Atom Heart interview (conducted 2000-10-10) as a bonus to a record review :

Q: "Might I ask from which record by which artist you took that soulful gospel sample at the end of the last Geeez 'n' Gosh album track, please?"

A: "Unfortunately I don't have that info. I took it from a gospel compilation which I had to return."

Damn librarians...!

(3/4) [UZINE FAVES INQUIRY SERIES] 2001-10

Mr. Uwe Schmidt aka Atom TM aka Señor Coconut aka Geeez 'n' Gosh aka BASS aka many more (see the websites listed below and be baffled) is once more releasing a lot of records these days: see our previous [uzine 01.18] for a review of Flanger's and keep an eye open for the Disk Orchestra cd on Rather Interesting as well as for his remix of Depeche Mode's "Zenstation" (aka "Denny") on their "Freelove" single...

- U: Which record or band has influenced you the most?

+ ATM: Haruomi Hosono.

- U: Which is your favourite record to fall asleep with?

+ ATM: Martin Denny "Exotica".

- U: Which is a brilliant record to wake up to on an active, sunny morning?

+ ATM: The Beatles "Abbey Road".

- U: Which is a brilliant record to wake up to on a hazy Sunday afternoon?

+ ATM: JS Bach "Fugen Für Clavichord".

- U: Suppose you've got 800 km of road ahead and you're going to be stuck with only one cd or tape in the car... which one had it better be?

+ ATM: "Best Of Perez Prado Vol. 1".

- U: What are other instances of superior driving music?

+ ATM: "Best Of Perez Prado Vol. 2".

- U: Suppose the same thing happens to you on a desert island: which album would you want to study forever?

+ ATM: Antonio Machin "Angelitos Negros".

- U: Which one comes as a close second?

+ ATM: H. Hosono & Yokoo "Cochin Moon".

- U: The horror, the horror: what if it'd be the other way around... which album would be unbearable to be stuck with?

+ ATM: "Best Of Toto".

- U: Which other bands would be sheer terror to be forced to listen to?

+ ATM: Oasis.

- U: What's the biggest laugh (i.e. the funniest thing) you've heard on record?

+ ATM: All Simon Philips solo albums.

- U: Vielen Dank!

(4/4) [INTERVIEW: GEEEZ 'N' GOSH]

Geeez 'n' Gosh is AtomTM in gospel Clickhaus disguise. Upon our interview request, Mr. AtomTM showed his Heart and answered at length to our questions. Answers received 2002-07-09 ...

- U: You've just made a second 'gospel record'. How fond of gospel are you?

+ A: I very much like all kinds of music, therefore gospel does not hold a special role for me.

- U: For instance, are you a religious man?

+ A: I would say so, yes. Not necessarily religious in terms of religion, but rather leaning towards spiritualism in general.

- U: What do you mean by that please? Do you read a lot of books and visit certain places, are you going about anthropologically, systematically studying humanity's diverse spiritualities and philosophies, or is it all more haphazard, based on a combination of coincidence and an alterness to pick up on things you encounter? When, for instance, do moments of meditation typically happen, if I may be so curious?

+ A: It's more about looking for different solutions to topics that I find important. A long time ago, I studied philosophy and after five years I left the university without finishing my studies, basically because I found that I had seen possible

solutions and there was not much to explore beyond that point. Everything had been basically said thousands of years ago. Philosophy and sociology are mental ways to understand things. After that intent I had a long period of search for new possibilities of understanding. Little by little mysterious things happened to me, which I found impossible to explain with common, scientific theories. One of those moments was the birth of my daughter. Being confronted with birth (and death), all of a sudden lets you feel scientific solutions as being totally insufficient and even ridiculously basic. From there on, I very much try to see and understand 'moments' from a non-mental, spiritual perspective. That concerns music as well as books or simple human relationships. The importance of words (also the origin of words, power of words, etc.) is one example, but I could mention many, many more... For example: good musicians don't use their mind, but their spirit.

- U: Does your interest in spiritual matters imply that you also have a precise view on our (capitalist) society, on politics, or...?

+ A: I don't think that I have a precise view, no. Life is an ongoing analysis to me. I find people with precise views suspicious. Especially politicians.

- U: Which have been some of your favourite encounters, e.g. books & authors or peoples & places... through nature or through art...?

+ A: I found a Sun Ra biography very inspiring. Sun Ra had a very spiritual touch, and I found his theories - not only those about music - extremely interesting and very uncommon. The last thing that caught my attention was a linguistic analysis, in fact seen accidentally on Chilean tv: did you know that the Spanish (and Latin) word for 'love', 'amor', comes from 'a mort' which means something like 'without death' or 'infinite'?

- U: What is gospel's main appeal to you?

+ A: That it is a well defined stereotype. It is easy to pinpoint and therefore easy and efficient to fuse and counteraccent with other musical or cultural stereotypes, such as 'click-' 'house, etc. Besides that of course gospel delivers and integral element of the Geez 'n' Gosh fusion, which is 'passion'. Passion perfectly completes the idea of that particular fusion.

- U: Has Santiago de Chili something to do with it?

+ A: I would not say so. Life in general has something to do with it, I would say.

- U: How catholic and devoted is that city these days?

+ A: South America is very catholic, but as I said, this does not have something to do with that idea of mine, I think. Spiritual ideas in general have always been much more important to me, no matter where they came from. One thing I have learnt, though, here in Chile, is what practically a 'religious' life means. I find that extremely interesting, not only for the music I make, yet for life in general. Central Europe, all the so-called 'first world' countries, perhaps Germany especially, have established an aseptic, anti-spiritual society, which is something I feel very strongly these days. Also, I very much believe that whatever social / global solutions we may look for, we won't find them without to some degree coming back to spiritual or religious topics.

- U: Could you please give an example of such 'topics', for instance in the form of a question or paradox ?

+ A: "I am not interested in the future, but rather in eternity."

- U: Has all of the above been one of the main reasons you moved from Germany to Chili? For instance, what bothered you the most about Germany - consumerism, hedonism, industrialisation, environmental matters, sociopsychological ones, too many people with neuroses... ?

+ A: No, this had not been a direct reason that made me leave Germany, but it was rather something which I realised was missing where I was coming from. I think the distance to the subject of interest is very important. All of a sudden not living in Germany anymore, I can see what is good or bad about it... what is missing, what is going wrong, or well. The direct reason, though, was 'too many people with neuroses', that's absolutely true. Now, the distance to the subject of interest is still the only way to see things clearly... I am trying hard to move myself into orbit to earth, of course in a non-literal way. My friend Burnt Friedman tends to call it 'the alien perspective' and I think this describes it very well. Remove yourself out of any existing set of values, as much as possible (of course). This will give you absolute freedom. Whenever I am coming back to Europe I see everybody working on the same project, which in my eyes is a camouflaged capitalist project. Musical and design minimalism for example are direct extensions of the capitalist streamline idea of human existence, though nobody seems to see it - much rather they believe that their project is a real alternative or 'progress'. That's why I am denying music and design rules... and rather try to create confusing moments that seem to fit, but then don't... [See also our links section and [uzine 01.18] & [uzine 02.10] for more about Burnt Friedman, who is also Atom TM's partner in the Flanger project - ed.]

- U: How soulful do you consider your own gospel work?

+ A: Rather more funky than soulful perhaps...

- U: How many parts religion, how many parts soul, how many parts irony?

+ A: Interestingly I am very often confronted with the word 'irony' or 'kitsch' when it comes to certain works of mine (Señor Coconut is another example). I can assure you that I am not an ironic or sarcastic person at all and that I even highly dislike sarcasm or irony since it usually dequalifies cultural elements, perspectives and after all 'truth'. Geez 'n' Gosh therefore is not ironic, and the inspiration and intention is absolutely sincere and real. To me 'irony' and 'kitsch' are brought into discussion usually when the listener is unable to see the entire picture of a certain work, as proved quite clearly to me with the Sr. Coconut project. For those who can't understand 'belief', 'religion' in a contemporary context always has to appear as irony. Perhaps my work should be seen as a tool to expand perspectives, rather than to laugh about contents one may not know.

- U: Speaking of 'belief': earlier on you used the word 'solutions'. To which 'problems', please? What is the main issue, do you think? Is it 'being able to believe', or...? For instance, the Dutch author Arnon Grunberg [who is living in New York, most of the time, incidentally - see also www.grunberg.nl], recently wrote something like "western man is depressed because he is not able to create himself an illusion he can believe in, while at the same time he is not able to escape the illusions which others force upon him and which he cannot believe either but by which he still lives all the same, out of fear". Would you go along with the opinion in that quote, or do you see things differently still? [The Grunberg quote was hastily, and perhaps not entirely accurately translated from the 2002-06-11 issue of Belgian weekly Humo - please check Mr. Grunberg's column in that issue for the exact quote - ed.]

+ A: That's indeed a good way to see it. I am not sure about the definition of 'western man', but still, I think I see what he points upon. It fits with my analysis that what makes terrorism such a powerful tool, is 'belief'. Belief is the weapon of the third world, something the first world cannot control, nor by airport controls and confiscating nailclippers prior to boarding. That's perhaps something we cannot understand, or perhaps don't want to understand because it is frightening us: kidnapping airplanes ONLY needs belief and no other 'extras' whatsoever. Yes, perhaps the main issue is 'being able to believe'.

- U: "I'm determined" calls to mind R&B a bit. You've already done a rap album; would you consider doing an R&B album too?

+ A: Anytime.

- U: By the way, what is Tea Time doing these days?

+ A: He is part of a quite known Chilean hip-hop/funk band called Los Tetas. They just recorded another album and I think he may be on tour with them these days.

- U: "Sing you children", "It's no secret" and a number of other tracks on "Nobody Knows" also sound like an exercise in deep bass. Were there preliminary parameters within which you wanted to work, apart from the gospel concept? Do you work that way at all?

+ A: I find it a bit difficult to talk about musical ideas, I mean those musical ideas which do not refer to 'content'. When I was conceiving the Geez 'n' Gosh concept, I had a certain sound going on in my head, something which I find almost impossible to put into words... a certain groove and a certain surface perhaps... and I knew how to achieve that idea on a technical level (technique). 'Bass' was a parameter to a degree, that is true, though not a main one... rather a parameter I allowed to appear I would say.

- U: Are there things you still want to achieve sonically? Narratively? Genres you urgently want to try out?

+ A: Genres there are millions. Not all of them are known to the masses and therefore won't speak to anybody except me, I fear.

- U: Gospel (G'n'G), Latin (Señor Coconut, Sampler's), jazz (Tubesound), Brazilian (Midisport), easytunes (Satin), pop (LB), ... How is it you're so familiar with so many musical styles?

+ A: Well, I like music in general and therefore listen to all kinds of music. What inspires me is 'capturing' the essence of styles or artists. Once you've got the essence you can pretty much reproduce it. Each style (general musical developments) or artist (specific musical development), as well as each song, each note and performance necessarily is a part of the artist who created it. Listening to music is like reading a person... a person's 'extension'... his / her soul, mind, etc...

- U: Do you really set out to make an album in a genre and then study it, or is your approach rather more whimsical?

+ A: I am not 'studying' it in a logical, theoretical sense that much, but rather study it on an intuitive level. It's a bit like working in a kitchen can make you a good chef... listening to music can make you a good musician if you don't use your mind too much.

- U: Have you developed a large collection since your Lassigue years, do you go to flea markets or buy from the internet, do you lend records from libraries or friends?

+ A: No, I am not a collector. I am not buying lots of records at all. I consider my CD collection to be small, really. I think you can capture most musical ideas by listening to just one song or maximum one CD of a style or artist that interests you... There is no need to buy all Deep Purple albums, if a simple "Best Of" will do...

- U: How fertile is Santiago de Chile when you want to study jazz, for instance?

+ A: Not fertile at all, I think. But this is a bit like asking 'How good are the pizzas in Greenland?' If I want to have good pizza, I go to Italy, right? So, Santiago offers a lot of interesting cultural moments which are totally unknown outside of Latin America and which are truly inspirational since they refer to a unique set of parameters. I have just been to Argentina for example and there you also have huge musical movements, totally 'mainstream' which are not existing outside of Argentina at all. They are proofs to me that 'globalisation' is a totalitarian concept without future.

- U: Could you give a few examples of such unknown moments or movements which do not exist outside of Latin America please.

+ A: Some weeks ago, for example, I was invited to Córdoba, Argentina's second biggest city. On my last day, I visited the concert of a 'local hero' from Córdoba called "la Mona". I did not at all know what to expect, and believe me, it was a totally astonishing experience. The music is some sort of electronic, yet extremely cheesy 150 bpm 'tarantella' (Italian folk) mutation, which sounds a bit like the Central American 'merengue'. You see thirteen musicians on stage, some behind huge towers of synthesizers, others playing e-drums, congas, etc. The crowd: six thousand kids between 16 and 25 years old, mainly lower class people. Best of all: everybody dancing 'cheek to cheek', in a very old-fashioned dancing style! A total massive cultural movement that denies all first world 'globalization' ideas. I am sure those 'micro

worlds' exist all around the globe, yet to a much lesser degree in so-called 'first world' societies. Latin America is very rich of those moments which are very unpolished and non-standard.

- U: How many days in a year are you in Chili, as a matter of fact?

+ A: Depends, really... When I have to tour a lot, as happened the last years with the Coconut project, perhaps 50% of the year...

- U: The US label Otodisc has just rereleased the HAT disk you made with Haruomi Hosono and Tetsu Inoue. In a previous interview you said you had great respect for Mr. Hosono. Was the collaboration a dream come true?

+ A: It was not really a dream, since I never 'wanted' to work with him. It just happened, while I never even would have dreamt about this possibility.

- U: Could you tell us what the project was about and who did what?

+ A: The concept for that recording sort of fell into place while we were working on it here in Santiago... and as far as I remember it was all sort of about 'travelling' and transporting travelling into sound. Tetsu and myself did some preproduction and basically programmed most parts of the album, while Hosono directed us and played instruments and certain melodies, lines, etc. when he thought it was useful. He is a great musician...

- U: Who are the people behind Otodisc, incidentally?

+ A: It is mainly Tetsu Inoue as far as I can see.

- U: How important are hardware and software to you?

+ A: Less important than a clear mind.

- U: Does your setup change regularly?

+ A: Not regularly, no. Changes usually are provoked by technological developments - like suddenly with a new operating system some software or hardware becomes incompatible and you need to get an update or new machine... That sucks, of course, but happens constantly and keeps the system changing.

- U: Do you read specialised press to stay up-to-date on new hard- and software?

+ A: No. Equipment in general, and buying equipment especially, is a pain in the ass, I find. A totally uninteresting topic.

- U: Do you get sent software to try out?

+ A: Fortunately not. I reject those 'offers' usually, since they are a waste of time.

- U: What's the most exciting bit of innovation you've heard for a while?

+ A: An interesting idea.

- U: What is your opinion on Akufen and his microsampling?

+ A: Not familiar with it.

- U: And on Andrew Pekler's approach to jazz, which calls to mind Flanger's?

+ A: Still unknown to me... sorry...

- U: Many thanks for this e-interview!

+ A: Welcome!
