

Christopher Willits - October 2006 English Version

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Author

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CM>>>Christopher, after several projects and several collaborations with people like Miguel de Pedro or Zach Hill "Surf Boundaries" is your first complete solo album. What feelings do you have a few days before the street date? Are you happy with the first reactions you've received?

Christopher>>> I'm very happy with the feedback I've been getting. People are really connecting with these sounds in a way that I did not expect.

CM>>>Do you also have plans to perform "Surf Boundaries" live to the audience or is this album to complex with for a live set? I ask this question because a lot of artists want to try out how the audience reacts directly to the music, reactions you probably never receive without a direct contact to the audience.

Christopher>>> I do have plans to perform surf boundaries live. I have recruited drummer Sam Ospovat, vocalist Maria Zoe, and Adam Theis horns and bass, Kenric McDowell bass and samples, and I will be playing guitar, samples and baritone guitar, and processing of it all. We are going to play the whole LP all the way through with video weaving in with the sounds. The 1st show is Oct 20th in San Francisco. Then a short east coast run and longer 3-week tour in the first of December throughout the US. I hope to make it to Europe in the early part of 2007 and Japan in the summer.

CM>>>What I really love about "Surf Boundaries" is the pleasant fact that although the album is very complex and conceptual, you are never tempted to skip the tracks, it's a real....., hope it's the right word "listening through" album. Do think the word "concept album" is the right description for "Surf Boundaries"?

Christopher>>> Yeah most of my releases have some concept that glues all the sounds together in a way. The concepts grows from the sounds and my life. I never decide an arbitrary structure for a release or the music within it. It always grows from the ground up.

CM>>>I would like to know what "Surf Boundaries" means? I don't know too much about surfing and it's terms. I just constructed a theory about the title that it is meant in the way like: "live in general is a up and down we met people we leave people. Friendships relationships come and go, when we have everything we miss something and when we have something we miss everything. Maybe comparing live with surfing: like waiting for a wave, maybe the perfect wave, and when someone had a ride at a perfect wave he is looking for the next and better one.....". Now laugh about me and please explain me what's meant by this wonderful title. Is there a special story behind this album?

Christopher>>> You pretty much nailed it. Surfing the boundaries of energy between people and being conscious of your own space, in order to make the healthiest decisions for yourself. By surfing, perhaps feeling the healthy boundaries between you and the people around you. A US reviewer mentioned that stylistically the music on "Surf Boundaries" surfs the boundaries between many different genres. That's a cool read of the title too I think. That was not intentional though.

CM>>>But besides discussing the meaning of the title I have to say that the music, the title are perfectly

represented through the wonderful artwork. Who did the artwork and who had the idea for it?

Christopher>>> Maiko Kuzinishi, and old friend from art school, designed that piece. I had ideas about animals and things morphing into other shapes and energy, and she represented what I was thinking so exactly.

CM>>> You live in California right, so I guess that you also surf a lot, right? (laughing)

Christopher>>> Actually, no, not at all. People do surf in San Francisco, but the water is freezing cold and it's infested with Great White sharks. I'll take Hawaii and a warm beach please. Funny though, everyone thinks I surf since I used the metaphor of surfing in the title. I've done a little surfing, tried it, but I have yet to hang ten. And definitely never caught a freezing cold wave in San Francisco.

CM>>> A few days before I asked the same question another artist, but I must ask you this question again. Maybe I am wrong but sometimes I have the feeling that the music is connected to the place where an artist lives. So would you agree that your music probably would sound different if you live for example at the French Riviera or in Copenhagen? Do you think there's a connection between an artist's work and the place he lives or wrote the music?

Christopher>>> I think we are all influenced by our environment in ways that we are not always conscious of. There's the local vibe and people and colors and plants, and obviously certain musical leanings of specific cities. So in that sense I totally agree with you. It is impossible to know, however how this LP would have sounded if I made it in the French Riviera... Actually, I don't think I would get any work done if I lived in the French Riviera. San Francisco is cold enough that it keeps me inside working and off the beach. (laughing)

CM>>> Let's go back to the start of your musical career what came first Christopher the guitarist?

Christopher>>> Since I was very young I had a lot of interest in art, and did not start playing guitar until I was 13 or so. My dad bought me a guitar and after that I knew that playing music and making art was my path in life.

CM>>> When did you get interested in electronic music?

Christopher>>> I became interested in electronic music more through video art, sound art and old fluxus work. Nam June Paik, Steve Reich, Alvin Lucier, Terry Riley, Lamonte Young. I was more interested in the "electronic process" of music, realizing that any recorded music, anytime you use a microphone and transduce acoustic energy into a voltage, your music has become electronic. If you think about it, electronic music is not a genre per se its more of a description of a process.

CM>>> Have you played all instruments on "Surf Boundaries" also the horns and the drums? I also asked myself if you ever played drums in a Jazz band because the drums sound so perfect and jazzy?

Christopher>>> Cool. Yeah Sam Ospovat, an old friend from Mills College played drums on "Yellow Spring" and "Medium Blue". I dig his playing, he can add some interesting tension to a groove, by making it sound like it's on the edge of falling apart very gracefully. And Gabriel Coan Played Drums on "Colors Shifting" and "Green and Gold" and a couple others. He's a very grounded, rock solid drummer. Very happy both of them added their touch to these songs. I played a lot of the instruments on the record, but I did not play horns or strings.

CM>>> You work a lot with loops and I really would like to describe it as the "Christopher Willits Loop Technique". Because you cutted the start and end points of some loops in a way that that normally that they couldn't sound proper, but you shifted the points in away that the loops are always make sense. (Hope I explained it right) Are you fascinated by loops and do you experiment a lot with them?

Christopher>>> That's cool. Yes I love the rhythms and grooves that loops produce. When you find a good loop it vibrates and you fall into it. It can be mesmerizing. You actually described the process pretty well. I'm recording guitar lines and looping and folding them at different start and end times so that I make melodic rhythms out of the notes and melodies that I'm playing.

CM>>> Besides classical horns you used the shoegazer guitar sound, which was very popular in the Nineties. When did you become interested in this sound? And which bands have influenced you to use this unique effect?

Christopher>>> I've been making harmonic noise experiments since I first started playing guitar, so my

interest goes way back to my first years playing electric guitar. Back in the early-mid 90's Brad Laner from Medicine was a huge influence for me in terms of harmonic distortion type sounds. And of course Jimi Hendrix and John Coltrane.

CM>>>Who is the girl singing with you? From where do you know each other? The vocals sound very harmonic..

Christopher>>> Latrice Barnett sings in harmony with me. And a lot of these songs are about our changing relationship. She's one of my best friends of all time. She has an amazing voice and a very solid solo career in the dance scene. Her latest record, "Illuminate" out on Ultra Records is a good entry point for anyone out there.

CM>>>Can you tell me something about the recording process for "Surf Boundaries". Have you recorded the tracks ,f.e. the bass or the guitar, in a kind of live session while listening to the recorded tracks?

Christopher>>> All the tracks grew from guitar improvisations and experiments, so with time parts sedimented and collected, while others eroded away. I was constantly building and remixing what I had previously done until it felt right. A lot of recording and processing and subtracting. It was a very natural process in the sense that it all grew like a plant, from the bottom up. I never had an arbitrary plan for a certain sound or feeling. All of the emotion or feelings in these songs emerged from the sounds and my relationship to them, at that time in my life, gently pushing and pulling them in different directions.

CM>>>Do you use software for sampling or have you also used hardware for sampling? I ask this because of your creative loop technique.

Christopher>>> I make custom plug-ins to fold and resample my guitar in different non-linear ways. It gives me more control over the sounds that I'm able to produce.

CM>>>Maybe a boring question at first sight, but how would you describe your music? I really had difficulties to put it in a drawer when I told a friend about your album, finally I said organic electronic music....

Christopher>>> Good question. It's so hard to put names on this stuff. The avant-pop tag seems to work pretty well. Organic-electronic is ok too I think. I love it when people try to find new words to describe stuff they are hearing. We need more words to fill the gaps between the tags of experimental and ambient and pop and indie rock and electronic.

CM>>>What's behind the fact that you repeat the same lyrics in a different sound during different tracks?

Christopher>>>There are ideas of evolution, colors shifting, truth, honesty and hope woven into all the songs, so there are elements that are naturally repeated in different tracks.

CM>>>Am I allowed asking you what you do besides producing music?

Christopher>>>I love to garden, and ride around on my bike, eat amazing food, especially raw food and Japanese food, spend time with my friends, and dreaming about beautiful things and going to outer space someday.

CM>>>What do you need for a perfect day?

Christopher>>> I don't think I need anything really. I love to meditate, and luckily you don't need anything but your body to make it happen. That's how I start my day. And I make some tea and then I get to work on some music or some software stuff or responding to a great interview like this. But sometimes the weather is too nice in San Francisco and I need to go to the beach with a friend and a picnic, or go to Dolores Park and hula-hoop or play kick ball and garden strange looking plants.

<http://www.christopherwillits.com>

<http://www.overlap.org>

Interview Michael Mück

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