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## Phillip Schulze - Interview with Mark Slobin

Phillip Schulze

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Mark Slobin: Hi. Well, well. So. Yeah, it's been a while. [Banging on window blinds.]

Phillip Schulze: Andrew mentioned that you're retiring.

MS: Yeah, well, it catches up with you over time. [both laugh]

PS: Well, Ron is staying! The rest—

MS: Yeah, Ron will just stay forever, right. Yeah, things are good in the department. You know, Paula Matthusen came in and just kind of took charge and she's so effective. So the program is very lively still.

PS: Ok, good.

MS: So yeah, I've just had this project I invented of talking to people who came through Wesleyan from other places, and I'm gonna just you know, put up some of these conversations for some future history of the program. So, how did you first hear about Wesleyan and think about coming there?

PS: Yeah, if you remember the situation, I came first as an exchange student. For a year.

MS: What year was that?

PS: This was 2004 to 2005. Do you remember Rees Archibald?

MS: Yes, yes.

PS: He came with the exchange to Karlsruhe where I studied media art at this time. It was this exchange between Wesleyan, the ZKM and the Hochschule für Gestaltung, where I studied. And we became friends there, and we started to work together, and then he suggested that I should check out Wesleyan. So basically I did that, and I applied for the stipend to go there. I was actually the first one and only one, I think, to this day who went to Wesleyan on this exchange. So yeah. For me it was a real interesting situation because I was not studying music, you know, and I didn't really have a classical musical background. And to come to a place like Wesleyan... But they welcomed me with open arms. And then I liked it so much, and before I left—I just cutting some Ingwer—uhh, ginger—because my throat is, uh—anyway, then I enjoyed it so much and before I left I talked with the professors, “What would you think if I apply here?” so. Then I left the US and finished my diploma in Karlsruhe and applied at the same time for the master in composition. I returned with a delay of one year I think. So this was then from 2006 to 2008.

MS: Right, so you got quite an extended exposure to Wesleyan, right. Yeah, that's true, that's an unusual trajectory. So when you first got to Wesleyan, what surprised you about the place? I mean, it's so different from the German academic context.

PS: It is, yeah, and this was a major problem for people coming from the US to Karlsruhe I think, because it was not as welcoming as at Wesleyan, where you have an office for every problem you might run into, you know? In Karlsruhe, once you study there, you have to figure out by yourselves how it works. It's a really different situation. So at Wesleyan it was really welcoming in that sense. All the evolved people made it quite easy for me. The— bureaucracy, what do you call it? Just, you know, the office that takes care of all the things.

MS: Logistics.

PS: Yeah. Exactly. Yeah.

MS: So you arrived in this little New England city and it must have—had you been to America before, or?

PS: I was in New York in 98 I think.

MS: That's a little different, right!

PS: New York and Boston, just traveling with friends. So yeah. But yeah this was different. I remember the first time, what was—Krishna, Krishna—

MS: Winston?

PS: Winston, yeah, she picked me up. From New Haven, I think, and drove me through the small towns toward Middletown— so this was my first experience. You know Wesleyan is, or better Middletown, is a weird place! [both laugh] It's so different. I mean, the university is a really unique place, and it's kind of in the middle of nowhere.

MS: Right, yeah. So some adjustment to the lifestyle. So who was in your group then, who did you come with in that year?

PS: If I remember right, it was Aaron Siegal, Jonathan Chen, Sabrina Schroeder and— it gets blurry a bit. I think there must be more, maybe one person more. Toby Twining. I think that was the first composition year.

MS: So that was an interesting group, I would say.

PS: Yeah, it was. There was Andrew Dewar as well, who became a friend of mine from the ethnomusicology department. Andrew was curating an open rehearsal at the chapel ones a week, so we did shows with many people there, you know? It was a really open lively community. Even though it's a small place, particular the composition program in the music department, it was enough, you know? There were enough wonderful and interesting people around.

MS: Yeah, it's sort of surprising how it's just this kind of sense of integration, you know, in a community that's not in a big city.

PS: Yeah. It is really focused, you just do all the work there, and study, teach, and—I enjoyed that, I enjoyed that a lot. In big cities you will not have this concentration.

MS: Right, you're always distracted. So, you knew Andrew in ethnomusicology. I mean, did you connect with world music in any way?

PS: Yeah, sure, I mean, you have to, huh? [both laugh] But yeah. First I played gamelan, like most people did. And then African drumming. But yeah, music-wise, I listened to a lot of world music, you know. Since then at least.

MS: So did that influence your thinking?

PS: Yeah, of course, of course. For me it the whole field of composition and world music, was new to me at this time. I was mostly working in the context of electronic music, programming software, mostly free of any historical context. So yeah it was a totally vivid experiences learning about different concepts around the world, like gamelan, pretty interesting. It's structure of regulation, the change of speed, and the granulation of events.

MS: But you didn't compose any pieces that were cross-cultural?

PS: Uh, no, I am more interested in indirect inspiration, I am not trying to sound like any of my inspirations. I am more interested in trying to find something that would be new for me. But, indirect influence, yeah.

MS: Hmm. In terms of structures you mean, and sense of time, and things like that.

PS: Yeah, and color, sound color. Yeah. Yeah.

MS: You reproduced it electronically, is that what you did?

PS: Um, it's like, let's say, with some, I don't know, Ghanaian pop music from the 70s. What interests me is, that the tuning might be a little bit off, it's more like a "felt" tuning, you know? It's different than in the 80s when the keyboard comes up and everybody used its fixed tuning as a reference—I like more complex resonances between the harmonics, you know.

MS: That's interesting.

PS: Something like that. Abstract, maybe.

MS: Principles. Yeah. Those are interesting principles that you can use as materials or things to think about. So you studied with Ron, or, who else did you study with?

PS: My advisor was Ron. But next to him, I studied with Alvin and Anthony as well. Yeah, I was quite nervous, you know? I went to Anthony's class and I asked him if I could play there, you know, with my— self-written computer program, and he was like, "Yeah, bring it," it was really great for me just to dive in directly like that.

MS: Uh huh, uh huh. Yeah, it's very demanding at the same time.

PS: Yeah yeah yeah. You remember my language was also a problem at this time [laughs]. Now it got a bit better, but the first year especially was quite demanding. Language-wise, you get tired to speak, and try to catch on. And music-wise, it was, as well, demanding, but the program was really welcoming at the same time. I never had a feeling that I was not in the right place.

MS: Oh, ok. Well, that's very nice to hear. Did you work outside the department with anybody?

PS: With my study—colleagues?

MS: Well like with other faculty in different departments. You met Krishna Winston.

PS: Mostly not. Not really. I was mainly in the music department. I sometimes worked in the science tower, but just to use some computers they had, for some renderings, you know computer rendering. Stuff like that. I never went to the German house or something! [laughs]  
As I said, music was enough to deal with.

MS: I can see that, right. So after, what kind of influence has that had on you still, or today, or how do you think about it today, or ten years later?

PS: Yeah, I'm in close contact with my professors and a lot of friends and students from this time period. And just, three weeks ago I published a new record [holds up album], a double LP with Andrew among others [holds it up to the camera to show the title, Ambassador Duos].

MS: Oh, with Anthony too.

PS: I met Anthony six times for an hour privately to just record duos. This was in the first year, second semester. And one of the session ended up on this LP. The first duo on this record is with Anthony from 2005. Later Anthony took me with him to the Moers Jazz Festival in 2008. With the rest, I'm still in contact. Andrew was here in Düsseldorf at the release of the record and we had a concert together. And with Sabrina I do concerts sometimes as well. Jonathan Chen. Yeah.

MS: Where's Sabrina now?

PS: She just moved to England.

MS: Oh, really. That's somebody else I should talk to.

PS: So yeah, all the contacts are still fresh. In the end, you know, I've more contact with people from Wesleyan than I have with people from Karlsruhe here in Germany.

MS: [laughs] Right. That's interesting. It's kind of transnational perspective, right.

PS: Yeah, I mean it's nice, but also too bad that all the people living so far away from each other.

MS: Yeah, everything gets too scattered. Well, yeah, I mean, those are the basic things that I'm trying to get a sense of from people's experiences. What, how they think about the program and what it meant.

PS: I have a funny—my business card is really funny. It's from the graduation from 2008. [Holds up business card to show picture]

MS: Oh, it's got a picture of you graduating!

PS: And in the left corner is Obama.

MS: Oh, there's Obama! Right, oh great, great.

PS: So this is actually my business card, you know.

MS: That's spectacular. Right. [both laugh] That'll confuse some people for sure, right.

PS: Yeah [laughs].

MS: Are there other things you think about that you'd like to add about Wesleyan?

PS: Um, I'm not sure. [Long pause.] Is Eli's still around?

MS: Yeah.

PS: Sometimes I think about the hamburgers there.

MS: Oh, ok! [laughs]

PS: I am still in close contact with colleagues from my second time in Wesleyan as well. I just chatted with Hiram, Hiram Navarrete, how do you say it? Hiram, the Mexican "Feldman".

MS: Oh, yeah, yeah.

PS: I am in contact with Brian, Brian Parks. And his brother who is actually studying German at Columbia University now. So yeah.

MS: It just goes on.

PS: It's really nice to see how the work of the composers develops over the years. I mean, the difference to Karlsruhe is most people from Wesleyan are still doing their music. From Karlsruhe, a lot of people stopped doing it. They went in different directions, are working for a company, a media company or something. The composers from Wesleyan are still doing compositional work and starving as artists [laughs].

MS: Right, yeah, Wesleyan people hang in there longer, it seems, right, than most people. They really try to keep going. Interesting. Well, some of them have been going to graduate school, you know, several of them went to Stanford, to the program there, the doctoral program, that's another way to continue. And then they bring Wesleyan ideas to those places, which is interesting.

PS: Yeah, I mean, I got somewhat lucky as well. I went to New York and then my money ran out and I went to Singapore for a year, working there. Then I decided to move back to Düsseldorf. Next to my work as an artist, I'm teaching at several universities here.

MS: Ok, great. Well, it's just really nice to talk to you and hear about all this. And that you're still so connected, that's surprising.

PS: Yeah, I wouldn't like to miss it, I have to say.

MS: Uh huh. Ok. That seems to be the basics, yeah.

PS: Do you have an idea what to do with the recordings?

MS: Yeah, we're gonna transcribe, you know, just edit it and have transcriptions, and figure out whether we put those online, you know, for people, or keep them in the archive, the world music archive, for reference. I mean, I have this dream that somebody's gonna write a great history of the Wesleyan program and its influence in the world. I just think there should be more material available. Testimonies, you know, of people who came through there. There's been so much influence, in so many areas, in composition, in so many countries, ethnomusicology, I've been talking to people in South Africa and China and Brazil. There's a composer named Heather Jennings who's working in a university in Brazil now. You know, people are just all over the place. And, so, you know, I'm just kind of collecting some materials for the future, right.

PS: I just gave a class about the acoustic avant-garde, it's not only about the traditional avant-garde but also about composers who changed music in the late last century. And tomorrow I will give a class about the music of Alvin Lucier [laughs]

MS: And you can talk personally about him, right. Right, right. That's good. Ok, so take care and you know, if you're in the states let me know. It's good to talk to you.

PS: Enjoy your retirement!

MS: Thanks, yeah, it's gonna be nice.

PS: Let's keep in touch.

MS: Ok, take care, bye bye.

PS: Bye bye.