

Still Life with Microphone History in a few paragraphs.



Welcome, everyone. Whether this is your first Still Life, or one of a few, I thought it might be helpful to have a little roadmap through its humble life. *Still Life with Microphone* began in 1999 as an image which turned around and around in my head. It was around the time when "interdisciplinary" and "interactive" were becoming buzzwords in the performing arts and music technology scenes, and when Meredith Monk and Laurie Anderson had already made so much work which practically defined the two 'genres'.

The mental image I had was that of a vase or a firepit; in essence, a container which could hold all of the many interests which were burning for me. Fire burns out without a vessel to contain it, and as I negotiated technology, conducting, contemporary classical composers, collaborations, multiple styles and genres, theater, film, video and other disciplinary dreams, *Still Life with Mic* was born at the Flea Theater in TriBeCa, the Triangle Below Canal Street in New York City.

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I named it like software versions, so that different configurations could be repeated in spirit. The first version (1.0, of course) employed a cast of two improvising actors, two bass clarinetists (Michael Lowenstern was one of them, in all the early shows) and a percussionist, with references to the traditional Mass and television interview shows, premieres of new works, and Walter Thompson's conducted/composing language called SoundPainting™; these different sources were juxtaposed to create the form of the show in real time. It felt a little like *A Prairie Home Companion* for the art set.

There have been six distinct incarnations over the years, with one huge site-specific production at the Whitney / Altria in Manhattan, driven by a huge digital video clock projected on the north wall, a large cast, and extensive sound design. We also performed "In The House of ETHEL" in the same space, one year later, which looked at ETHEL repertoire through the *Still Life* lens.

A few years ago, in concert with a departure from the band and a refocusing on composition and education, *Still Life* arrived at *Version X* (or 10) where it has sat comfortably ever since Luke DuBois and I began our explorations together. My idea was to pare everything down to a solo show to refocus and build the concept more solidly back up again. After many years watching Laurie Anderson's integrated work, I found myself desiring visual discipline with technology so as to engage the visual as well as the aural. I wanted it to be musical: why couldn't the aural and visual experience be so integrally connected as to feel like chamber music incarnate? Where music and film and video were almost one? Where each impacted the other seamlessly in telling a greater story, amplifying the performance experience in myriad unexpected ways?

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Enter my broadened understanding of Luke DuBois. Luke and I had worked on a record together which he produced, composer Michael Gordon's *Light Is Calling* (Nonesuch, 2004). I knew him as a musician steeped in the electronic music arts, a founder of the brilliant Freight Elevator Quartet and an expert in the software which was the lynchpin for the "interactivity" explosion of the past 15 years, Cycling'74's Max/MSP. What I didn't know, and subsequently found out, was that Luke co-authored the visual component of that software, Jitter, and that he was a video and conceptual artist to the same extent that he was a musician, composer and programmer. Needless to say we fell in together, and *Still Life with Microphone* has enjoyed a new life, enriched by this particular collaboration. From public service announcements to Presidential Eyecharts to live graphically rendered birds and spheres, Luke's work is a lens through which aspects of the music are fractured, filtered and multiplied.

Improvisation, composition, design, technology, real-time interaction and situational-inspiration form the basis of the program you'll see tonight. This evening also features the performance and music of two extraordinary musicians who bring their exquisite sensibilities to the our little party. This is a distinctly musical experience employing two different disciplines which are, as I always suspected, undeniably intertwined (as my original hypothesis stated). Luke and I both have an idea in common, that live music and visual art can amplify each other, and symbiotically create a culturally relevant and current "concert" experience -- listening to and watching art, both musical and visual, created in real-time, framed in a personal and sometimes disarming way, from multiple and varied viewpoints, as if from the perspectives of *Still Life* studies, one of the most tried and true practices of artists through the ages.