

[Opens ['Ella Speed' from Gil Evans And 10](#) (Prestige, 1957), ['Evidence' from Thelonious Monk Quintet](#) live in Philadelphia (1960) and live version of 'Evidence' by Parker & Wright (arrange)]

EP: Good evening. There a little bit of indecision at the start because we had a loose arrangement that somebody was going to announce us, but we will announce ourselves. This is Seymour Wright. And I'm Evan Parker. We chose that "[Ella Speed](#)" the early record that Steve made with Gil Evans because we both like it very much and just to make it clear that this is not going to be a regular concert, this is going to be a kind of evening of playing talking and interacting, er, with you, if you have good questions - only good questions please. [audience laughs] We'll get decide what are the good questions. So it's not a concert and it's not a formal lecture but we have- Seymour has fantastic research capabilities and I have a failing memory so with a nudge from me he can produce what I'm looking for and can find stuff that I don't know about and so that's what we've got for you. And a couple of interesting surprises I think. Now the reason we played Evidence was because that's a Monk tune Lacy recorded many times in the course of his life and his relationship with Monk was er, or the Monk's music but also with Monk, was a key moment in [Lacy's] life I would say, you know, in his creative life, in making that direction. We suppose that maybe the connection with Monk was made perhaps via Cecil Taylor because there it is on record in several different places that Cecil apparently said to Steve, "what's a young man like you doing playing old man's music?" because [Steve] was playing Dixieland - clarinet and soprano pretty much in the line of Sidney Bechet and the great players of Dixieland music. Cecil must have prompted [Steve] in such a way that they ended up playing together, and maybe that's the next cue - is it? We're going to play some of the - they made a record together in nineteen fifty- thank God I've been saved-

SW: 1956

EP: 1956. This is called ['Charge'em Blues'](#)

[Recording of Cecil Taylor's 'Charge'em Blues plays]

SW: I feel very awkward fading out Cecil Taylor but I've done it now... So you played with Cecil and Steve?

EP: It's true. We didn't script that did we? That comes much later in the story. I think we decided that we would try and make a break so everybody can refresh their drinks and get some fresh air at half time. And basically the first part is going to be talking about Steve before he came to Europe and the second half is after he came to Europe so - and although he went back to America to play quite a few times once he was established in Europe he, he never really went back there to live. I think he had a teaching job maybe for a year - these are the kind of details other people may be able to be more precise about. In fact he wrote a song with the title F U C K New York, er, quite soon after he got to Paris I think but I don't think he ever recorded it under that title. But the manuscripts there - it's in [Seymour's] hand - we're not making this stuff up.

SW: We started with a duet arrangement, or Evan did, of Monk's 'Evidence'. And you'd arranged it in what you described as a particularly 'Lacy' way, voicing. Can you tell me-

EP: Yeah I mean it - Steve is - maybe not in that in the period we're talking about - now he might not have used those kind of voicings but I just deliberately chose tones and major minor seconds - everything was in major minor seconds which is something that he used very frequently later on so if you thought "um, some of those notes sound odd", you're right, they were odd. Deliberately.

SW: Do you know why he did that? Did he ever speak with you about that?

EP: I think we have some we have an expert to talk about Steve's harmonic concept a little bit later in the program

SW: OK.

EP: This is Steve Lacy playing with Thelonious Monk.

['Evidence' from Thelonious Monk Quintet live in Philadelphia (1960)]

SW: So that was recorded in Philadelphia in 1960. 4 years after the quartet with Cecil.

EP: So in a way Steve - that must have been a kind of dream come true for Steve, I think he played not so long with Monk but maybe did five five weeks or something - I think I've read that. Anybody that knows more precisely just speak up - 'no, it was, and my references are X'

Audience member: It was 3 months.

EP: OK. We have three months, any advance on three months? OK. OK fantastic.

SW: But for me it's interesting that it follows him playing with Cecil. And not the other way around. Although he did record with Cecil in 1960 as well.

EP: And the the tune of 'Evidence' is based on the changes of a of an old standard called '[Just You, Just Me](#)'. Which knowing the way Monk's mind works maybe thought, "well just you and just me is just us, and just us is quite close to justice and before you can have justice you need evidence." What do you think Roland?

Rowland: Yep, good.

EP: Thank you. [Audience laugh] Only man I know that can do the AZ crossword puzzle without a dictionary. No, I added that bit. Roland Bass ladies and gentlemen. [Audience clap]

SW: And this photo [taken 1960 at Jazz Gallery NYC by Mili Rosenblatt] is Lacy with Monk in 1960. [Audience clap]



EP: That's the spirit!

SW: Which is a good one, and it's quite hard to find. It's in Lacy's book about the saxophone that we're gonna be playing some stuff from later on, which is called 'Findings'. I think it was taken in New York - so it's maybe the residency of which you speak, actually three months. A couple of years later you went to New York.

EP: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah oh the story. OK so, um. Either you've heard this before in which case just yawn or tap your fingers impatiently or you'll be amazed to know that in 1962 as an 18 year old I could fly to New York for nothing because my father worked all his life for British Overseas Airways Corporation as it was called then. And, er, I was lucky enough to hear the [Schooldays Band](#) play in a coffee shop in the West Village called Phase Two. And this band was essentially Steve and the trombone player Roswell Rudd with one of any one of 29 different bass players who did- that's a precise figure unless-. any advance on 29? I remember the 29 as the number of bassists they had in the band and the drummer was mostly Dennis Charles I think. who was playing on the Cecil Taylor record. The thing was that they set out to memorise the complete works of Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk and after a while they decided that was - they'd bitten off a bit more than practical. Practicable. And they decided to restrict themselves to the oeuvre of Thelonious Monk. At the end of the first set the new audience might have been as big a six maybe seven people - one of them young but cocky me - were told, "thank you very much, the band would like to take a break now, we'll be back to play for you a second set, don't forget we are a band that loves to play requests. We'll play any tune by Thelonious Monk." So as Steve came back to the back I said, on his way past my table, I said, "Mr Lacy could you play 'Four in One'?" And he said, "yes we can do that." And they did play 'Four in One'. And if I'd had my time again I would have asked for 'Skippy' but '[Four in One](#)' is [laughs]

[Evan plays Thelonious Monk's 'Four In One']

EP: Anyway. Anyway you could hear the problems I playing that. Partly that's because I'm very nervous tonight, especially nervous - we have a lot of distinguished people here who know so much about the subject and I don't usually play notated music of any kind so some of it I've memorized and I'm sure if I'd had a moment to calm myself I could have played it the first time through, but you got the rough idea of the shape of it and to me it was just an amazing feeling that I could ask somebody "can you play that?" and the whole band played it. Wonderful.

SW: But you didn't really talk with him very much on that occasion.

EP: No, I just asked him if could he play 'Four in One'.

SW: Right. When was the first time that you played with him?

EP: Oh yes, '[Saxophone Special](#)' I think. You know, Martin Davidson was in touch with Steve. Martin was responsible for issuing the first solo record the one from Avignon and he's still doing great, great research unissued Lacy material for his label called [Emanem](#). He lives in Spain now so it's amazing that he can still keep producing stuff and be in touch with everybody but I guess that's the age we live in now - you know, nowhere is away from where

you are unless you want to be. That's full philosophical remark. [Audience laugh] So I remember the occasion because Derek Bailey and myself were in Germany the day before - we we played, it was my project to play Paul Lytton, Derek Bailey and myself in the - it was in a studio that had state of the art analogue electronics at that time and the idea was to look at possible connections between improvisation and live electronic processing. Everything to do with that now is so much easier in the age of digital music. Digital machinery. So we, we arrived back on the day of the gig and everything - we felt rather international, and it was you know early days for us to be doing that kind of thing and we - I think we got to cab from the airport to the Wigmore. Think it was the Wigmore Hall. Yes it was the Wigmore Hall. And Steve was playing a record player, he'd asked could they provide a record player and some he'd bring some records of steam trains. Michel Weisse, the guy that went on to found the Stime in Amsterdam was there with his cracklebox and other analog synthesizers. There was Trevor Watts, Steve Potts, myself, and Derek Bailey so that, that was the set up and Steve written some music for that and it is actually an Emanem record. Which I think is still [available](#). The great thing was that a bomb exploded on Oxford Street and if you listen very carefully to the recording you can hear the bomb going off. [Audience laugh] Those were the days.

SW: But to go back to New York in the early 60's, [audience laugh] - had you decided to play the soprano when you saw - because you also saw Cecil and Jimmy Lyons and those people at that time. Had you already started playing the soprano or?

EP: Yeah it was that I wanted to be John Coltrane.

SW: Right. Who notionally started playing the soprano inspired by Lacy. Is that that-

EP: This - I'm looking nervously across to Roland now, I'm not sure. Yes, Steve said that Coltrane asked him what was it and Steve said well it's a soprano saxophone and Coltrane said what key is in and so on. They were - it was almost dying out the soprano at that point so if Coltrane is responsible for the real revival then without Lacey there would have been no, no revival but because it was Lacy that showed Coltrane that it was just like a tenor but an octave higher so, very simple thing to add to your repertoire. Although Steve was a little critical of Coltrane's very earliest recordings, he said he wasn't quite ready with the soprano you know. I think he was talking about the one with Don Cherry which I like a lot, the avant garde but er some of the tuning problems were not resolved at that point. So yeah. There is another story which says that Miles Davis bought the soprano for Coltrane, so I don't know which one you prefer to believe. We discovered that even four people that were at the same place in the same time, when they're asked to recall what happened - well you know that kind of thing.

SW: Yeah you all say different things. And this book, this is Lacy's book about the soprano saxophone called 'Findings' which is a bilingual book and is remarkable and interesting for all sorts of reasons and is technical and kind of autobiographical in equal measure. And procedural too. But there's a list of records at the back and he says Coltrane, John Coltrane - any record where he plays a soprano saxophone after 1962. To qualify. And there's one entry before that and it's Sidney Bechet. And he suggests either the Bluebird Sessions which

is '32-43 or the Storyville Black Lion Recordings, the Black Lion recordings from 1953. And one of the things that appeals to me greatly about Lacey's compositions is that almost all of them are dedicated to somebody. And the next thing that we've chosen to play is Lacy's dedication to Sidney Bechet. And Sidney Bechet was I suppose, is arguably a pioneer of the soprano saxophone or certainly one of the the most celebrated early exclusive players of the soprano.

EP: Yeah, no I would say the man, the only link between those is Johnny Hodges that doubled on soprano and kept it sort of half alive, but Bechet was the one. Without Bechet I don't think it would have had a the life to carry through because it was considered difficult to play tune - I've already demonstrated that but er. So was, you know, there was no space for it because the top lines in big bands in the reeds were being played by alto players and revival in that kind of context only came after the small group revival which was effectively spearheaded by Coltrane, then Wayne Shorter and so on but er, without Steve then Coltrane would perhaps not of taken an interest in the instrument. So we thank Steve for that, we also - what we thought, we thought we would throw a few items in just a random and The Wire - which is on sale or it's not called the Wire anymore but that the magazine, 'Wire', was originally called 'The Wire' and it was named The Wire' for a piece written by Steve Lacy. And Steve's picture was on that issue number one on the cover. 'The Wire'.

SW: And the title is - I think generally that the way Lacy uses language around music and around titles and dedications and a kind of what might - what came to be called intertextuality - of which he was an early great exponent, I think, is something to explore and get stuck into if it's not something that you've encountered. So that the piece we're going to play is also triads, triplets, and is one of Lacy's three note figures. But it also has um, a kind of dynamic formality - can we say that? OK. And maybe we will play it and then stretch it and come back and play it. So.

EP: Yes baby, no baby.

[Evan and Seymour play ['No Baby'](#)]

SW: So that's a piece called ['No Baby'](#).

EP: If you hear Los Mohalo saying, "yes baby no baby yes baby nobody no baby" you'll know that that's come from Lacy. He took that from Lacy, "no baby".

SW: And it was written like lots of Lacy pieces and then reworked. So it was written in '72 and the version we played is '87.

EP: Is there a version with vocals? With Brion Gysin? Is that possible or is that?

SW: Maybe.

EP: Yeah I seem to remember there's - Brion Gysin stuff was very much about permutations. The one I remember is, "no junk is good baby, no - junk is good baby. Junk is no good baby, baby junk is no good" - and so on, like permutations. That was a Brion Gysin approximation.

SW: Yeah the approximation. One thing we were speaking about this afternoon was the extent of the nature of the relationship between the piece and the dedicatee. And I wondered often with that piece how it maps onto or is mapped onto Bechet, say. If it's a procedural thing or if it's a dynamic thing or if it's a, a much more pragmatic thing. For example there's a piece called what's it called? 'The Whoosh'. Dedicated to George Orwell that was written on December 3rd 1983, so there's a kind of logic to why he might have been thinking about Orwell.

EP: This from the lesser known book of W. Most people that follow Lacy closely know the book of H, with 'Hocus Pocus'. Wim Merton is the guy, the Belgian guy that issued the record of the book of H, Steve Lacy playing the book of H. But there's a less well known 'Book of W' which I, I'm not sure I've got the complete thing but the dedicatees here a very interesting - here's one called 'Willy Nilly' which is for Ralph Richardson. And one called 'Whoops' which is for Peter Sellers. There's the forementioned 'Whoosh' to George Orwell. 'Waterline' to Lenny Tristano. And 'Wrinkles' to Orson Welles'. And 'Windfall' to Jerome Kern. So it's pretty, yeah wow is the word. And there are other - there are also pieces dedicated to fictional characters so the 'Josephine' is dedicated to the mouse, Kafka's Josephine 'The Mouse Singer'. And that's on the first solo record which is that Avignon record, which is the first Lacey record, I really, I listened to and had a big impact on my playing. Because Evan said when he first saw Lacy, but I actually only saw Lacy once and it was when I was one. [laughs] So I don't- and Evan was playing as well so I don't remember particularly clearly.

EP: Oh ok. I was playing when you saw Lacy? Really?

SW: Yeah - Company. Oh I remember that Company tour - there's an anecdote about this which you might find interesting. Between the soundcheck and the gig which was the last gig of the tour, was at the Royal Northern College of Music, Steve's soprano was stolen. And he, well, he took it extremely well. He said, "the sopranos gone, what shall we do? And Braxton was there with the sopranino, so I said you could you could play my sopranino, so he played Anthony Braxton's sopranino, we got through the gig, everything was fantastic and afterwards we all went to Steve and said, "that's amazing, you sounded so fantastic on that thing. Would you consider adding it to what you do?" He said, "no, no, no, no, no. I'm giving it back to Antony now, the case is closed, it will never be opened by me again." (I'm improvising some of this stuff) "Tomorrow morning when I got back to Paris I'll go to the Selma show room and I'll ask him to give me another instrument." Because he had the arrangement that he'd take the old model back and get the new model - he was a great believer and a great advertisement for Selma saxophones and they always were ready to give him the latest model and he felt 'OK if I'm not playing the old one I'll give it back to you.' So that was the deal that he had. And he never played - as far as I know he never played sopranino again. But it was great to be there. Another little anecdote.

SW: Did he also have mouthpieces made by Selma for him?

EP: Well, no. This is a bit geeky for. We can go there if you want but -

SW: I think is interesting!

EP: It's a famous thing, saxophone players talk about mouthpieces, reeds, ligatures, you know the kind of stuff. There's a picture on the front of the Evidence record with Don Cherry where you can see that he's playing a Selma soloist mouthpiece. Whether it been modified or not you don't know, you can tell. But the mouthpiece I'm playing now is a modern reproduction of that soloist mouthpiece and I've done absolutely nothing to it - they're very well made and they always were. That's more than you can say for some aspects of the saxophone itself but the mouth pieces they always did a good job. In the end period Steve was playing a very open link mouthpiece - like custom open, so a twelve he said, "I think if they put a number on it would be a twelve" and they don't go to twelve's -

SW: By open, that's the tip opening. So that's the distance between the end of the reed and where the metal or sundry other material of the mouthpiece again.

EP: OK. Yes correct and um, so twelve doesn't exist but it was specially made for him. But then you play a really open mouthpiece- you can't put a really hard reed on that and get anything like the kind of flexibility that Steve was looking for so he played a number one reed and sometimes even number one reeds were too, too hard. I've seen him actually softening up a number one reed to play on that huge open mouthpiece - but that, if you trace the evolution of Steve's sound it's pretty much to do with issues like how open the mouthpiece, how hard the reed. And how high the moon. [Audience laugh].

Audience member: Can I ask a question? Is that the reason for the extraordinary range of initial attacks he seems to have at his disposal? [inaudible] Is that what that's about?

EP: Well it would, that would factor into it but it depends if you're talking about specific periods or Steve Lacy's attacks across the whole output of his recorded work - well then that would be more about the sound in his head - his idea of what it means to be him playing the saxophone. And then perhaps the evolution of the mouthpiece and reed combination was in search of more and more control in that direction in the direction of the approach that he'd already established using more regular combinations. Does that make any sense?

SW: We were talking about this this up because we've been playing all afternoon working through some different pieces of Lacy's and talking about Lacy and thinking about what we might play. And somehow we started talking about Sonny Rollins. Tenor player. And the way he conceptualized or not and could change or not that the quality of the sound of his tenor saxophone to make it flute like. Which is kind of an example of this, but there's a there's a particular instance of Lacy-

EP: Are you going to play that one?

SW: Yeah I am, I'll find it.

[‘Things Ain’t What they Used to Be’ Buell Niedlinger/Cecil Taylor Octet (Candid, 1961)]

EP: This was new to me. While you're cueing it up I could say that I think that you know the famous bridge where Sonny Rollins practiced I think Lacy would go out there sometimes and practice with Sonny, was always welcome to - if people wanted to join him out there, fantastic idea of not disturbing anyone. You know it's saxophone players dream, "no I'm not upsetting anyone by practicing, I can do whatever I want and nobody's upset."

SW: And he actually talks about that in 'Findings'. There's a section where he talks about going to do that and going to join Sonny Rollins on the Williamsburg Bridge I think. And now he likens playing in the open air to weightlifting which I'm not sure if that's something that he also did but? And that the kind of the lack of any obvious acoustic resistance, and the encounter with environmental and traffic sound - are there trains that go over that bridge? Probably there were, then, lots of traffic, um, pushed him he said towards a different - I don't know if he uses the word larger but certainly a different quality and projection of sound and that's, I think, that would be around the same kind of time of the examples that we've been talking about.

EP: Definitely and listening to Rollins from that period that the stuff that you did for R.C.A. immediately after the bridge was the first record but there are quite a few records after that. One of the most amazing being the studio version of 'Sonny Meets Hawk!' which is, purports to be, recorded at the Newport Festival - was actually done in the studio some days afterwards or even weeks afterwards but there is a unofficial recording I think of of the actual concert with Coleman Hawkins who just sits in for a couple of tunes in Newport, but Sonny's got that is clearly working on - I know we're diverging from Steve but that it when you hear this example you'll understand what we're driving at - that this control of tone colour which is all about the control of the reed and all of that, and breath. Allows the saxophone to make many different tone colours, and here Seymour thinks Steve sounds very much - especially in his opening phrases - very much like a flute.

SW: Yeah I was listening to this the other day, it's a Cecil record, it's an octet with a quite odd aggregate of people in it including Clarke Terry the Ellington trumpet player. And suddenly there was a flutist and I want to hear the flute player was. This will be be a somewhat ugly edit but we'll get there. I have to go back a bit....Yeah.

SW: Yeah because I think around that time the contexts that Lacy's playing in are peculiar but his sound was - I had thought at that time was much more stable and much more somewhat in a sense old fashioned, before the the kind of more radical pushing to the '70's. But when I had that I thought that that was not the case and to me it's an example of the kind of weird explorative aspects of his playing right from the beginning in a sense.

EP: We wondered a little bit if the Siguard Rascher book - Top Tones for Saxophone had become kind of current and this encourages control of the overtone series from the lowest four or five position so that the the lowest tube is closed but the overtones that are available from those tube lengths have a very different colour that same pitch if you played it -- and sometimes a very different pitch depending on the instrument and where the mouthpiece is

so there are all kinds of options for control of tone colour that I think maybe both of them were influenced by that book and working with control of the overtones.

SW: You know and I suppose an extension or a tangent - whichever way you look at it that other - there's lots of animal pieces that Lacy has written and produced. A lot of which are about apparently or not, really or not, using the saxophone to mimic or not, the sounds of creatures. And they - to me they're fascinating because they straddle this strange kind of um, ambiguous nexus of the real the abstract, the onomatopoeic, the kind of semantic, and the art and craft and I find that also fascinating. And the piece that I'm going to play in a bit in the second half is is one of those ones.

EP: You can play-

SW: I could play it now yeah, no it's good

EP: We could find the the section where Steve talks about the flexibility - basically Steve says the saxophone can mew and it can meow and it can bark and it can do all of those things. Somewhere there's a list but I didn't put a bookmark in it. Ah! Kiss, sigh, whine, sign, hoot, peep, pop, shake, zap, push, scream, scrape, smack, glide sneer, cheer, croak, snip, snap, slap, crap - no! I'm not making this up. Sip, bust, snore, fart, gulp, shriek, yodel, whistle, crackle, you got the idea. And now Seymour will play all of those and more.

SW: The piece I'm gonna play is called 'The Duck' and it's the piece that Lacy wrote to Ben Webster and it was the first - the two first Lacey records that I listened to a lot both had versions of this piece on and they were really important in my conception of what a saxophone is for. And I always wondered what it would be like to play it and I never thought that I would dream of trying to do that, but I'm going to.

[Seymour plays ['The Duck'](#)]

SW: OK so. It's quite hot so we'll take a break.

SW: Well. Welcome back. As so that was Evan playing a piece called ['The Dumps'](#)

EP: 'The Dumps' by Steve Lacy arranged for the Globe Unity Orchestra, so I dug out the part, and is dedicated to um Jelly Roll Morton - I think so yes. To Jelly Roll Morton and is quite - by Steve's standards - quite a tuneful little tune really. At that stage the other thing that we recorded with Globe Unity was called 'One of Us' and was absolutely the opposite of tuneful and the voicings were very, very thick indeed and as I say we have a have a specialist on Steve Lacy's harmonic sense coming to talk to you in a bit but for the moment we have a very interesting piece - Seymour's take on a very interesting piece that Steve made on a record called 'Lapis'

- this is called ['The Cryptosphere'](#) - in fact I found it such an interesting piece that I tried to - well, I'll explain how it works. He asked the engineer in the studio to play a jazz record -

apparently he didn't care what it was - should be on a record player, a portable record player in the corner of the studio playing a long way from the microphones. It happens to be a Ruby Braff record - Ruby Braff is a kind of second or third generation traditional jazz player. I can't tell you what tune he's playing because I don't think I know it but it will be a standard along the lines of the sort of repertoire that those musicians played. Meanwhile, Steve is doing things very close to the microphone. OK. So I thought this proposes a sequence - there's a record playing, there's a guy playing with a record very close to the microphone, what can I do in response? So I made a piece called 'Lapidary' So a lapidary is somebody who cuts the stone which is the lapis and, er, my version was that I put the microphone inside the saxophone, closed the bell off with sound absorbent material, switch the tape recorder on then recorded the sound of Steve's record 'The Cryptosphere' only by opening and closing keys on the saxophone. I recorded the right hand channel through the right hand, to my right hand channel; I recorded the left hand channel to my left hand channel and there was even elements of controlled feedback so it was quite a pioneering concept. One which I hope to develop further in a second life. For the moment Seymour is going to play, go back to 'The Cryptosphere' and um, this is a recording that he made - because of the technical aspects it's a pre-recorded thing.

SW: On a phone

EP: Yep and Seymour will play it for you now.

[Seymour plays 'The Cryptosphere', recorded by night London July, 2018 by Crystabel Riley (containing Steve Lacy playing Thelonious Monk's 'Ruby My Dear' recorded Paris, 1969).]

EP: Would you like to explain the little how you worked on that piece?

SW: Yeah. Well, so that the piece was really important for me because the first time I heard it I suppose I was in my twenties and I had it and tried then to work out how Lacy was doing the things that he was doing on his version. Which led me - misunderstanding what he was doing - to work out a whole set of other stuff and other ways of playing the saxophone because what he's doing on the original is he has the mouthpiece and he's rubbing the reed against either his hair his beard - I think his hair - and he's playing the open neck of the saxophone as the Ruby Braff record is being played in the background. But I didn't know that so I spent a long time trying to work out how to make the other sounds on the saxophone in a normal way. And then when I realized he had it in pieces trying other ways of making sounds on the saxophone in pieces. So, I thought it would be nice to reconstruct 'The Cryptosphere' partly in a more kind of classical way which is the first two thirds, and then there's the second third was my own sequential deconstructions and techniques that emerged out of that piece.

Audience member: What year are we talking about?

SW: '71 he recorded that.

EP: Recorded in Paris so this is, we're in Europe now, Steve's made that the definitive break with New York.

SW: But as I understand it that kind of micro playing emerged out of a lot of stuff that was happening in the late sixties when Steve lived in Rome - which we might touch on in a bit. But I also wanted to decrypt or encrypt thematically in a kind of intertextual - pretty clumsy way actually - what he was doing so - 'The Sphere' is a Monk piece it's Lacy playing 'Ruby My Dear' which is a Monk piece so there's the kind of, kind of ugly cryptic

EP: I think it's very good, but I may have only just realised myself so 'Sphere' was Monk's middle name so 'Cryptosphere' seems to suggest a kind of hidden Monkery, er, which Seymour has decoded very cleverly.

SW: Well...And it was also recorded at night because again I think that much of the- many of the techniques that exemplified on that solo emerged through domestic playing in the middle of the night, so this whole kind of set of micro or - well micro worlds - there's a track on another solo record called 'Micro Worlds' which is this particularly detailed, intimate aspect of the saxophone which to me is especially fascinating given what he was already capable of doing and the profound technical mastery that he'd kind of attained in the sixties. To then dig inside in a very different way is yeah, is great.

EP: So Steve had a band with an alto player Steve Potts - many different versions sometimes quartets quintets, and this piece I think '[Flimflam](#)' although it's not from the book of F - why not there should have been a book of F - and 'Flimflam' would be in it, but we're going to try and play 'Flimflam' for you.

Audience member: Who would it have been dedicated to?

EP: Ah we know the answer. George Russell.

SW: Yep. And it was written in the eighties. Yeah written in '86.

EP: But this business of how Steve decided to dedicate I think you need some very special kind of markers or something, I think the the idea of the George Orwell, one to George Orwell 'Whoosh' on the eve of 1984 probably wasn't an accidental connection but some of them are very hard, very hard stretches - why Ralph Richardson? Why Peter Sellers, you know? Very, very hard to understand.

So Steve Lacy moved to Europe in the late sixties, and you know he came to London because Evan already said, and he was in Rome for a bit and then Paris for a bit and then back and forth. And he made records with many people and in the later seventies was involved with the first iterations of Company?

EP: I would say the second or third phase of things. Company was Derek Bailey's idea of er - originally it was based on the idea of a repertory theatre company where there would be a cast list and different people would be chosen for a different plays, so the equivalent of a

play would be a gig, a performance, and Steve was in fairly early on but not in the very earliest cast list as it was.

SW: I think from that emerged a set of records and a duo record?

EP: Yeah.

SW: Called [Company 4](#) which is Steve Lacy and Derek Bailey which is a particular favourite Lacy of mine because he gets into all kinds of strange saxophonic territory so we're going to play a bit - this bit -

[‘Once Upon A Time’ from [Company 4](#) (Incus, 1977)]

EP: Steve had a quite ambivalent relationship with open free playing but there are a couple of texts in the book we've been using 'The Findings' which I think are quite interesting and I'll read them in reverse order. So the first the first one says, "Listening to free improvisation is like watching a tennis match (somewhat). (A) good opening, poor return. Inspired volley, surprising action. Boring round. Brilliant play, unintentional foul. Stimulating collaboration, sudden letdown. Flash of energy. Show of finesse. Daring risk, beautiful give and take. Unforgettable rhythmic patterns. A game about life and death. Comparisons with other matches. The greatest games are inscribed in the spectators mind like music." Etc. There's a lot you can unpack in that text I think and the other one is called 'Free post free poly free' - "Back in the sixties we played completely (we thought) free. No harmony, melody, rhythm or structure. Just controlled chaos. Automatic writing. Action painting. It was very exciting. Revolutionary music. But after one year the music started to sound the same every night. It was no longer free. Then came the post free, where we started to limit and control and exploit the kind of playing we discovered. After some years of this the discarded elements - melody, harmony, rhythm, structure, form, returned to the music - but not like before. Renovated, refreshed, wide open with possibilities. We called this 'poly free'." I think he's using the royal 'we' there, I'm not sure. "We called this 'poly-free' because the freedom might be anywhere in a given piece. Also one became free to be not free if one chose." A good point. "Personally I prefer a music that is both written and improvised, with a coherent structure and a clear way to play in it so the whole thing makes sense - inside, outside, the beginning, the middle, and the end. But I've participated in much completely spontaneous play with musicians of all styles" (you just heard one with Derek Bailey) "all over the world and this can be very interesting also. But not necessarily for concert presentation - more as a kind of research and recreation." Nice touch that. "However, Monk told me another thing." Here's a quote, "Whatever you think you can't be done, someone will come along and do it." We didn't get to Monks rules but Steve made a - they're easy to find on the Internet, Monks rules. This is one of them - "whatever you think can't be done, someone will come along and do it." So then Steve says, "I'll keep experimenting as long as I can just to see where the music will go, what it will do, and what it will become." And now I would like to welcome our absolutely surprise guest to us, almost as much of a surprise as it will be to you we have Maestro Frederick Rzewski in the audience and he's prepared to come up and put his point of view about all of this stuff so please welcome Frederick Rzewski.

FR: Thank you. OK. Well I don't have much time and neither do you.

EP: In the existen- in the bigger picture?

FR: Well let's face it. But first of all I would like to merely melt the ice here - I happen to know why this piece is called 'Cryptosphere'. OK. Because it was my idea, OK.

EP: OK! Isn't it to you, Seymour wasn't sure but we thought-

FR: I don't know!

EP: OK.

FR: Anyway at that time this was - I'm talking about 1969, Steve was living in our studio in Rome on Via Pietro Peretti, in Trastevere right - which is a place that nobody should live in. And [laughs] you know, it was a completely underground place and I mean we made music there but we didn't sleep there. All right so at that time I read this article I think in Scientific American about the 'cryptosphere' which is a biological category. The place where - between the atmosphere and the what do you call it, underground? Huh? I don't know. I don't know - I don't remember but where certain kinds of life forms are able to exist because they have no enemies, they are not seen, they're hidden - 'cryptos'. So life forms - certain kinds of lifeforms - like millipedes, centipedes, God knows what, are able to evolve bizarre form, you know creatures with 117 legs things like that. Because they are free to speak. And of course this interested in me because [laughs] because it's interesting because, you know, describes certain kinds of humans as well - including Steve Lacy. So that's where that comes from. OK.

EP: Ok. I promised the people that you would explain Steve's harmonic approach - approach to harmony.

FR: What?

EP: Harmony.

FR: Hamann?

EP: Harmony, the some of the simultaneous sounding of, you know clusters and all that.

FR: Well yes I mean I don't have time because to go into this at great length and nobody else has either. Because we're going to leave soon. So what should I say?

EP: Tell a story about Steve doing-

FR: I'll tell you a story. I'll tell you a story which I have told many times. Around that same time '69 or something and he was living in this studio and he had no money. So that's why he lived there [laughs]. And after he left, went back to Paris various people, café people from

different cafes and restaurants would come up to us and say you're by the way your friend [laughs] he, you know, he had big bills and never paid them. Are you going to pay them? And in fact we did pay them because we lived there. OK. So at one point I had just bought one of these new Philips microcassette recorders - a little tiny thing I was having a lot of fun with it, and even used it to perform in concerts. And so I went up to Steve one day and he was coming out of one of these cafes where he had not paid and said, well I went up to him and said, "Steve - in fifteen seconds can you tell me what is the difference between improvisation and composition?" And without hesitating he said, "in fifteen seconds the difference between composition and improvisation is that in composition you have all the time you want to to decide what you want to say in fifteen seconds, whereas in improvisation you have fifteen seconds." So I took this home and timed it and it was exactly fifteen seconds long. And I'm not kidding I'm telling the truth.

EP: Am I the only one that thinks the story is absolutely accurate but the protagonists are reversed? [Audience laugh] I've seen it as a story where Steve was interviewing you Frederic and that was your answer.

FR: No, no , no, no, no, no, no, no, absolutely not.

EP: You see the way history is written, it's extraordinary. Here we have the guy that was there saying no it wasn't like that at all - that's the way it's written up, isn't it Roland?

Roland: You said it.

FR: Well.

EP: It could have been you.

FR: You can't believe what you read. That's all. So you know all I can tell you is what I saw - I only know what I saw. And I'm alive.

EP: I have to take that as primary material.

FR: Which is to me a reason for people staying alive. A word to the wise.

EP: Ok. I'll take my vitamins tomorrow.

FR: Just, just do what I tell you. OK right.

EP: Tonight I shall drink I.P.A. like you Frederic. Just to make it clear, not everybody knows but Frederic is part of a-

FR: it doesn't matter.

EP: Called- well, it matters.

FR: No, no, no, no.

EP: Frederic is part of a a group called Music Electtronica Viva with Alvin Curran-

FR: That's, that's fine but the important thing was that I knew Steve Lacy.

EP: Yes.

FR: That's what we're talking about.

EP: Ok. With Steve Lacy I believe you made to duo record of pieces called 'Rushes' - is that correct?

FR: Yes. We recored it together.

EP: Why is it called 'Rushes'?

FR: It's about Russia. Russian writers, Russian 'refusniks'. He was big on Russian anarchist poets and things like that.

EP: He was very well read. He told me about books I'd never heard of. Not difficult but.

FR: Yeah, yeah, sure, sure, sure. But er you know, we all have reasons, whatever inspires you to make music, you know, you don't need an explanation. Yeah so OK. And Steve Lacy well the important thing about him was that he was a great composer. Yes, people think of him as a jazz musician, an improviser which he was, but he was also a great composer. He wrote probably two hundred songs which nobody knows and he wrote pieces for all kinds of compositions for orchestra and so forth. And these things tend to be swept under the rug for I can't say what reason but it's important to recognise this fact I mean, I am a composer myself but I'm also an improviser. You know - I'm 80 so I've done all kinds of things but it's time - it's great that you're doing this, you know, this man was a very important musician but he wasn't just - he wasn't just what it's fashionable to talk about, he happened to be a great artist and a great writer. He was very precise about his writing. I played with him all over the place and I played his piano music - he wrote these scores which were very - he wrote these clusters, tone clusters with, you know, dozens of notes like - they looked like grape, what do you call it, bunches of, clusters of grapes! OK.

EP: Flyshit in the current terminology.

FR: [laughs] Flyshit! Ok. All right so, I was, you know, like any pianist - I would fake them. {Audience laugh} I would fake them, of course. I mean that's - what you don't learn in conservatory but you know, any professional pianist knows that you have to fake - if you're going to play music of today, you can't maybe fake Beethoven or whatever but if you're going to play Steve Lacy, well you have to fake it that's all. And so course I did that and then in the rehearsal Steve would stop and he would say, "well wait a minute". You know, "that's not exactly right" and of course it wasn't right, but he knew what he wrote you know. And so he

you know he was a serious composer and he wrote it down and he knew what he wanted to hear. And so I would have to practice at it. OK.

EP: Is it true you used to read Superman comics while you were practicing as a kid? You play with one hand what you were supposed to be-

FR: No. This is nothing to do with it. We're talking about Steve Lacy.

EP: But the people want to know. You're a character.

FR: Well I'm sure they- actually I read Donald Duck. [laughs]

EP: So it was the ideological content-

FR: Alright [laughs]

EP: You were already a Marxist at that early age.

FR: Alright, alright let's stick to Steve Lacy. OK. All right so I think - when is this train going? It's twenty to eleven. And the train is at eleven? That's twenty minutes from now. Should we leave? Hello? Oh. OK. All right. Yeah, next time. All right. [Audience cheer]

EP: Fielding has already started negotiating with Frederic about an appearance here and you know if you see Frederic coming back to Cafe OTO you must hear him play the piano he's an amazing pianist. That's just a second string, you know. Bit like me. I love to make people laugh. Haha.

SW: Thank you for coming. And I think. Steve Lacy is great, yeah. It's really hot so we will stop. Thank you.