



With Derek Bailey, mid-1980s, shortly before the Incus split

recalls. "We were negotiating through the accountant because he was so abusive I didn't want to take telephone calls. I knew it was a weird request and there was absolutely no grounds for it. The principle of the division was that we each take our own projects, and third party projects should go back to the third parties. The idea that it shouldn't be reissued was thrown in as a rider, but I was so anxious to get it over I agreed."

Bailey's death at the end of 2005 permitted Parker to issue the first CD version of *Topography Of The Lungs* on psi, and an expectant mystique surrounding this 'lost' document was finally satisfied. "I still think it sounds a good record," Parker says, assessing their work 37 years on. "At the technical level, I was very much interested in articulation and flutter tonguing. That characterised the stuff for a long time. I heard a tape of me playing with Paul Lytton in Berlin in 1974 recently and it's full of saxophone playing that's even more in your face than this. We thought at the time this is energy, this is life, and now I'm thinking – all that's true, but give me a break." Can Parker explain the record's inherent streak of violence? "The dryness of the recording – there was a lot of reverb in the studio and the mics were fairly close. But it's not a complete travesty of how we would have sounded at that time, even in a room with a sympathetic acoustic."

But was there a breakout of the DBs EPs? "Yes, very specifically on that date," Parker clarifies. "Han and I had been on Parliament Hill Fields in the afternoon, and we'd gone to meet friends who'd just come back from Ibiza, and they'd also been to Nepal and brought back some of the long horns. Han played one and they were so blown away they gave him the biggest horn. Then we got stuck in horrible traffic and we were late. Derek was furious – he said that he'd waited for us for 20 minutes, so now we'd have to wait for him and he went out for a walk. That's where we began from. I think he liked to play off a certain kind of anger – 'adrenergia', let's call it. That kind of thing happened often enough for me to see it as

a pattern. Or maybe it was just me who drove him to distraction. That's also possible. But eventually I thought I've had enough of this shit."

Fishing for more clarity about their split, I tell Parker that speculation over the years about what really happened has bordered on JFK-like conspiracy theories – that he and Bailey were involved in a love triangle, that the schism was directly political, or about money. Parker takes time to ponder the options before he answers. "It wasn't about politics; there was no woman," he asserts. "Money? Not exactly, but there was tension about the use of resources within Incus. It was more about our different sense of what the relationship was. I was trying to make it equal, but Derek's view was always that it was his job to think of things for me to do, and that I'd do them unquestioningly. It was an inherent clash of longterm views."

"Derek defined improvisation as a series of negatives," Parker continues, as I ask how their disagreements manifested themselves musically. "It's not free jazz, he didn't like saxophones – his theory was internally inconsistent, in my view. The idea that practising at home improves your capacity to improvise while playing with a particular combination of people diminishes this ability is having your cake and eating it. He painted himself into a corner with 'non-idiomatic improvisation', and spent a lot of time inventing situations to support the theory."

One of the most talked about aspects of the aforementioned Bailey interview was a picturesque dream sequence, portraying Evan begging on the streets having failed to schmooze Arts Council bureaucrats. "I haven't got a clue where that came from," Parker retorts. "Many more hurtful things were said by Derek, so it's not the insult, it's the specifics that are annoying. My dealings with the Arts Council came to an end years ago. Ironically, in the early 70s, when I was on what they called the jazz sub-committee of the Arts Council, Derek was the only person who took me up on my suggestion that

people applied for money. I took it as my job to represent a constituency, and I told everyone that if I can do anything to push your case, I'll do it. The funding for Company [Bailey's improvisation ensemble] came that way, from the Arts Council! But the last thing to look for with Derek was common sense. You got quick gags – one-liners – in interviews, but factual accuracy was neither here nor there."

Thinking across the history of the improvised music scene, drawing together loose ends. When the histories are written, Parker's outstanding legacy will perhaps be that he was the great traverser of overlaps – a musician able to meaningfully contribute to the axes represented by jazz, by John Stevens's Spontaneous Music Ensemble and by the methodology of Improv collective AMM. "It's been very useful to think of that AMM approach, for which I use the term 'laminar'," says Parker. "Each musician takes responsibility for a strata within the music and they are not so much worried about locking the layers together. In SME locking together was everything. Then the Music Improvisation Company was – for me – a synthesis of those two approaches. Listening over the past ten or 15 years, I've thought that gradually a lingua franca of improvised music has evolved from those three possibilities."

Aging – more specifically how the topography of the lungs shifts with age – becomes an increasing concern for wind players. But history is catching up with the fighting fit Parker, now 63, for more banal reasons. Back in the 1970s, convinced that glass reinforced plastic reeds were the future, he bought a job lot, and three decades on he's running out. "I know this is more appropriate for a reed players' magazine, but it's a real dilemma," Parker reveals, drolly aware that he's precariously hovering around anorak territory. "The ones left are unpredictable and I can't always get them to play, so I've been working with another type, much more like the traditional cane reed. I did a solo concert in an art gallery in Sweden recently and I changed reeds for one piece just to see what would happen. It's a challenge because I know what I can do, and if I don't get to certain places I'm easily disappointed."

Derek Bailey's death, reissuing *Topography Of The Lungs* (originally *Incus 1*) and reaching the end of his reeds bring some aspects of Parker's life full circle. But he's serene. "I listen to earlier things and talk about lung capacity!" he concludes. "But I don't want to do that anymore, and that's the fortunate thing – my musical appetite is aging with my body. From your side, perhaps, that looks like complacency, but seen this way it's more like applied intelligence. I fantasise about the last period of my life being practice only – no gigs, no other pressures – practice for the sake of practice. It's such a beautiful, simplified set of problems and relationships. I've pared the whole thing down to its core... the relationship between me and the instrument. That would be a marvellous way to finish." □ The CMN Free Noise tour begins this month. See *Out There* for details

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