

Astro Interviewed by Tristan Burfield. September 2002 (Lethe Voice festival, Nagoya)

For my final year of university I visited Japan to compile a research project on Japanese noise music. I had performed very few concerts and was a rookie when it came to making electronic music. The Internet was in its infancy and I hope to find out more about this mysterious and undocumented scene. I interviewed Astro in September 2002 before a performance at Lethe Voice Festival, which featured noise, performance art and happenings in an abandoned warehouse in the seaside town of Nagoya. I had no Japanese language skills and Astro did a great job of communicating his ideas despite a sizable language barrier.



Q: What is your motivation for making noise?

A: I want to free sound, loud sound is so free.

Q: What is your current set up?

A: I record everything in PC > into mixer > into CD recorder. I use digital sound. I use many sampling sound, for example: water sound, natural sound. I use natural sound with effect, I then mix the sounds.

Q: Do you perform live a lot? How do you perform? Are there many noise concerts in Tokyo? Do you play outside of Japan?

A: I perform about once a month. My live set up is similar to my recording routine. It is the same sort of the process using PC and FX. Usually I use ring modulator. I like ring modulator very much (as it sounds like a mini synthesiser). Tokyo sometimes have noise performance, no fixed place. About 10 years ago I performed in USA and Europe area and now I play only in Japan

Q: Is it received differently in other countries?

A: In USA, audience is very straight to their passion. It is very nice I think...so nice reaction. In Europe they are like Japanese audience. So I perform in England and UK only one time...but there audiences are very nice people!

Q: You started in 1984 using mainly drum and voice, how has your style developed over time?

A: I started in 1984 with free improvisation, free jazz style drumming. I played drum performance about 3 or 4 years. Next I changed to electronic performance because free improvisation is a little bit boring for me.

Q: How have other noise artists and bands from Japan influenced your styles outside of noise?

A: When I was playing free improvisation, I felt free improvisation is so good that I want more loud, more strong style using loud sounds. I didn't think that style was noise, but audience and the people say that is noise, well ok!

Q: In 1984 C.C.C.C performed improvised noise, what was the audience reaction? Why did you use extreme noise levels?

A: When I started C.C.C.C in 1989 people in Tokyo don't like noise. So I started C.C.C.C almost all people didn't like our performance!

Q: In 1993 you started a solo project using synths, what was your motivation for this?

A: I like German psychedelic music. All German psychedelic artists use synthesiser. I like synthesiser sound like Klaus Shultz, Amon Duul. I like German psychedelic very much!

Q: Can you tell me a little about the ideas behind the Amercian Treaty compilation?

A: This compilation is very funny compilation because of the Japanese and American combinations. Each artist has a very nice sound, the title is so funny!

Q: How does your Astro Black 2 project differ from your work as astro?

A: I did Astro Black 2 performance only one time. It was a duo between me and Miko Hino. The project featured only 2 performers; this was different line up to the full C.C.C.C. band and my solo work as Astro.

Q: What was it like collaborating with Nord?

A: I like Nord's sound. He is one of my favourite number one artists. We have a similar sound. I talked to them with a view to collaborating and they answered yes Ok. I want to perform this as a permanent project not just a one-off collaboration!

Q: What formats do you prefer when releasing your music?

A: I prefer tapes and LP's. Tapes are good because they are cheap. I like analogue record sound.

Q: Do you rehearse for noise performances? Is practice important?

A: Practice? Noise is not so much about technique. Noise is not so technical, but I think mind is very important for noise. Mind practice is very important for noise. So I prepare for performance at home, I record in my home. At home I can't be too loud. I use headphones!

Q: What are your forthcoming projects?

A: My main project is Astro and Messier 31.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your links with Endorphin factory?

A: Endorphin factory release mainly C.C.C.C. It is a personal label for C.C.C.C. Endorphin factory also organise Miko Hino and me. We also promote some noise shows, organise other artist such as Monde Bruits and Violent Onsen Giesha. We release compilation CD and compilation videotapes. Do you know kingdom of noise? This is very nice compilation: all Japanese artists. Hijokaidan, Merzbow, C.C.C.C, Incapacitants, Solmania, Dislocation, Monde bruits: but now all sold out!

Q: Is it hard to promote labels in japan? Have you come across any difficulties?

A: It is very hard work promoting on the independent scene. I want to keep performing, but it is very difficult to make a living because independent scene is not so commercial!

Q: What are your views on noise artists releasing music on major labels? (such as Violent Onsen Giesha , Boredoms etc.)

A: I don't like some major artists. Violent Onsen Giesha and Boredoms operate close to major area. It is so strange. I think it is very strange. I don't know the major label situation. I only know independent area

Q: Do you think noise will ever become mainstream?

A: I don't think noise is very mainstream. Mainstream music is all about major artists. Noise is not so mainstream. The underground is such a deep area. I like so much!

Q: What are your feelings live?

A: I try and capture the atmosphere of where I am playing. Some areas have a unique feeling. I want to feel the areas atmosphere.

Q: What inspired you to use bondage imagery in C.C.C.C?

C.C.C.C performed bondage performance in USA. The audience was very exciting but I don't know why. Miko does bondage performance, but not striptease. The bondage show featured Japanese style bondage. She was a porno actress before joining the band. Maybe audiences don't know about she is a porno star, but that is ok!

Q: How does Japanese noise differ to noise from other countries?

A: Western noise often features strong religious themes. Japanese noise is not so religious or political. It often features pure sound. In a way it is very simple. Noise being just noise is better, I think!

Q: Have you noticed the noise scene change over the years? In what ways?

A: Noise has a larger audience than before. 10 years ago the audience featured very few people, but now audience for noise is so large. Much larger audience! Before the underground scene felt quite closed. Now it is wider and the audience is larger. There are so many more artists. I hope that more artists develop their own individual styles and perform to larger mixed audiences.

