

UNCOOL – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

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My life as an improvising saxophonist and creator of performances depends to an unusual extent on breathing; on liveness; on improvisation. Breathing and liveness are both threatened by this pandemic. Improvisation, though still possible, is constrained and has to find new routes.

By the middle of March, many musical colleagues and friends with whom I had been performing at the beginning of the month had caught the virus; by the end of April several had died of it. Live performance could be fatal.

From the beginning of lockdown I started to make more digital documents than usual, in order to keep track in a straightforward way of fast-changing circumstances and responses. My initial estimation of these was that they were poor surrogates for the flexibility and richness of live improvisation; the all-important human feedback loop with an audience in a mutual space and time is lost, and that is like speaking into a void... If I think about it too much the longing is almost overwhelming.

This is still true, but as time passed new ideas came about. Given that the principal means by which I would normally communicate – unmediated live and improvised performance – was no longer available, and had proved to be demonstrably dangerous, I could not act on my underlying desires, but had to improvise new ways of working. This is a vaguely chronological selection of work done since March 2020: The first piece I completed after the lockdown began was Breath Clock 4 April 2020. I don't think it requires much explanation. <https://carolinekraabel.bandcamp.com/track/breath-clock-4-april-2020>

The next piece is not finished, but was begun on 26 March. My daily permitted exercise during that period of fairly total lockdown took the shape of bike-rides around a deserted London, and I began to film the empty streets on my phone, very informally. Although both sound and picture were pretty rough, I kept coming back to this 45-minute film because of the voids it depicts. In Poschiavo I will continue the work of going through this footage and blending the voices of instruments with the sounds of the mostly empty streets. For me this allows the world to tell me what and when to play. These rough and imperfect audio-visual documents also have a power that comes from the fact that the places and sounds they depict are already no longer possible.

In some respects this is an extension of work that I began in January 2002 as *Taking a Life for a Walk* and continued after 2006 as *Going Outside*. I walk outdoors playing the

saxophone, formerly in the company of one or other of my infant children in their pushchair, and now on my own. Some of these saxophonic walks were broadcast live on Resonance 104.4FM, and I used live phone-box feedback to emphasise the two intersecting and yet almost always completely distinct live audiences, on the streets and on the radio.

Clearly, walking outside while playing the saxophone was one of the few sorts of live performance still permitted under lockdown. On 27 April I undertook a half-hour walk, which was broadcast on Resonance FM.

<https://carolinekraabel.bandcamp.com/track/27-april-2020-going-outside-happy-birthday-resonance-1044-fm>

On 19 April I made *Unsung*, a piece that addressed the loss that any form of recording represents in comparison to live performance, and also the way in which recording is implicitly OF the dead and FOR the living. I recorded eight short solo improvisations and, without listening back to them, put them into a software that represents sound as a series of green waves on a black background. I made analogue visual representations of the waveforms of each improvisation, and then erased all of the eight pieces of music except the claps that signified beginning and end. All that remains of the improvisations is the drawings, woodcut, collages etc. depicting their digital representations.

<https://carolinekraabel.bandcamp.com/album/unsung>

Throughout the pandemic lockdown I've been helping continue the work of the London Improvisers Orchestra (LIO), a vast and ever-shifting group that has been exploring live large-group improvisation for 22 years. After the beginning of March we were faced for the first time with cancelling our monthly live performances, and together we tried to find ways to make music that would somehow capture a faint trace of the LIO's extraordinary spirit of collective large-group improvisation as a musical, social and political practice.

For our July release I cycled to visit individual London Improvisers Orchestra musicians and conducted them from outside their homes, or, for LIO members who wanted to take part from far away (Korea, Malaysia, Switzerland... Edmonton), conducted them via video conference. I used a timed series of cues, different for each musician, and each of them recorded their own improvisation. I combined the resulting recordings by 23 separated musicians into one orchestral piece, *Together Alone*.

<https://londonimprovisersorchestra.bandcamp.com/track/together-alone>

I've also been involved in a number of releases this year, notably May's day night, with John Edwards, released on Cafe Oto's Takuroku label:

<https://www.cafeoto.co.uk/shop/john-edwards-caroline-kraabel-day-night/>

For more information, see <http://www.masskraabel.com/>

By 2 November 2020, Caroline Kraabel will be posting two albums relating to the work she's done at UNCOOL, in Poschiavo.

The first *Observations and an Assault* will consist of preparatory recordings for the making of the film soundtrack for London March 26 and 28 2020 (on which she has been working in Poschiavo; release information should be available by January 2021). These recordings were made while walking in London streets during the two weeks before the residency, as Kraabel tried to learn to play the sounds of traffic.

The second *Alone in Switzerland* will be solo saxophone recordings made in the warm wooden embrace of the UNCOOL rooms in Poschiavo.

There will also be a short film available!