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Interviews

Kristoff K.Roll

By [Vito Camarretta](#) - August 2, 2022



Calais Jungle could sound like the name of an exotic place or, considering we're on a music-focused zine, some specific style of jungle music. In reality, it's a camp of migrants set up on the outskirts of the city of Calais in the hope of crossing the Channel to reach England. It's the place where the project **Kristoff K.Roll** worked on **"word is a Blues"**. They tangled blues and electroacoustic music and techniques with the stories they collected from migrants living and spending some time in a place that many situationists would consider a non-place. Kristoff explained to us, during this interesting interview, that *"jungle because in Persian and Pashto, the forest is called jangal. There was indeed a forest, but the trees were gradually cut down by the refugees to keep them warm. Up to 9,000 migrants have been counted in this camp. It was dismantled in October 2016. But migrants returned with the hope of joining England"*. Let's know this release better by the words of its authors, and let's know them better.

Chain D.L.K.: Hey there! How are you doing?

Kristoff K.Roll: Ourselves, not so bad. But if we open up our scope a little, let's say, the world doesn't turn around very well.

Chain D.L.K.: I guess I talked about your project on our zine on the occasion of the issue of **"A l'Ombre des Ondes" (In the shadow of the waves)** some years ago. What did you think about those words (even reviews can sometimes be reviewed!)?

Kristoff K.Roll: It's always exciting to have "real" listening feedback. Is our intention perceived as we imagined? What is heard, taken, or understood, that we did not imagine?

In music in general, but even more so in improvised music, the listener is an indispensable partner through his active listening. Often a review is just a repetition of the presentation written on the cover. In your case, you gave a point of view, and especially a language to say it. It's precious.

J-Kristoff: I know it's not easy; I do reviews for "Revue & Corrigée", and it takes me a long time!

Chain D.L.K.: In spite of that sort of introduction, it would be nice if you introduce your project **"A l'Ombre des Ondes"** in your own words.

Kristoff K.Roll: In the CD you reviewed, the dreams are in French. Since then, our collection of dream stories (Library of Dream Stories) is now multilingual. We have dream stories in over thirty languages. For example, we are coming back from Iraq, and there we recorded stories in Iraqi Arabic, in Sorani Kurdish and Kurmanji Kurdish, in Aramaic, and in Persian. There (in Iraq) we played (improvised) with these stories, but as we have their precise translation (thanks to the local translators), if we replay them elsewhere, we will offer bilingual versions. Either the dreamer told it to us twice, in two languages, or we look for a voice that sounds interesting, musical, and in tune with one of the dreamers (male or female) and we record the translation using this voice. This translation work: giving to ear the sound of the original language, keeping its musicality, and having the meaning understood becomes an exciting musical challenge: parallel voices, alternate voices, polyphony, meeting similar words, etc. This game with languages is a new object to listen to, which is superimposed on the meaning of the words of the dream narrative itself. We love to hear voices, phrasings, timbres, accents, speeds, flows, and hesitations; we marvel at each other's dialects.

There are also two new sequels (continuation) of this project: *Petite suite l'Ombre des Ondes* (Short suite In the shadow of the waves) and now a *Grande suite l'Ombre des Ondes* (Long suite In the shadow of the waves). For the latter, we wrote music score for the "Dedalus", and the recorded stories are no longer orchestrated by our electroacoustic improvisations played targeting headphones, but by these instrumentalists (guitar, cello, flute, trumpet, and percussion) on a stage.



Kristoff K.Roll – courtesy of Bérangère Mabé

Chain D.L.K.: How did your artistic routes meet together?

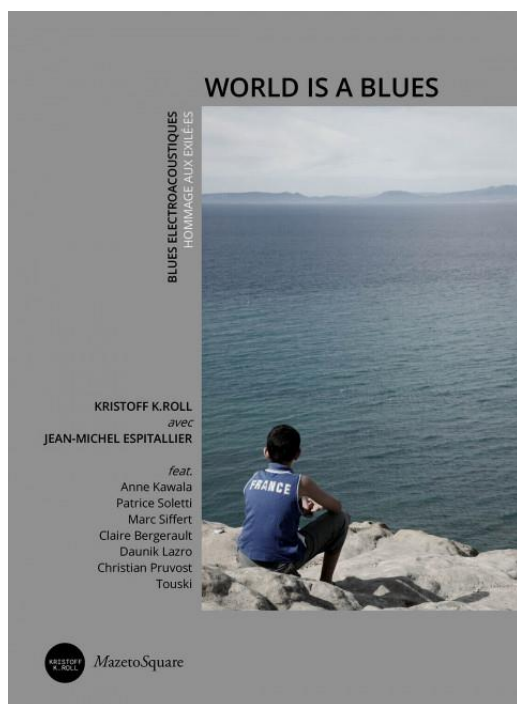
Kristoff K.Roll: Around a turntable. We were both playing in a turntable septet in Paris: *Les arnes du vinyle*. When the abused turntables broke down, the group ceased. Both we started to compose electroacoustic miniatures, *Les hey! Tu sais quoi...* (Hey, You know what...) carried out in a single day and a single night from daily improvisations. Carole was then part of "La muse en circuit" (Luc Ferrari's studio). As we were also in the same musical mood, with similar practices, that made co-composition quite easy, especially when you are flying on a little cloud of love. And it has been going on for more than thirty years.

Chain D.L.K.: I can understand we are somehow masters of our destiny, but what's the role of fate in your artistic and musical research and in your own lives?

J-Kristoff: Regarding musical matters, what happened that I did not master: A classical guitar teacher who knew how to make me not give up the study of music and its daily practice, like many do while being a teenager; friends with whom we enjoyed playing rock; a friend who made me discover jazz, and play jazz; being present, because it was free, in front of 40 loudspeakers at an acousmatic music concert (even if it wasn't totally a coincidence that I went there). This discovery totally changed my musical path to go towards this music, where I found and still find a lot of freedom and possibilities – possibilities broader than the music itself. And then also one day fall into full improvisation with immense joy. And regarding my life path, finding myself at the age of 20 traveling around Madagascar, which I absolutely did not imagine possible to do one day. These few weeks have turned my brain, questioned my vision of the world, social and political, and changed it completely.

Carole: When I was a child, I learned to play piano, and it turns out that the family piano was quite damaged ... some keys sounded unorthodox, and others sounded extraordinary. The amazing mix of sounds won me over little by little, and the noise made its way into my life! I didn't like to follow a music sheet, I liked to improvise, but my teachers, women, were not open to this practice, so I stopped. I missed the music, and especially the sound. When later, I found myself, by the greatest chance, at an acousmatic music concert in Lyon, then, call it a revelation or love at first sight (rather at first sound!). For a few years, I had been looking for "non-compliant" composition processes, I was thinking of going to study oriental music in Venice, and suddenly this particular work with space overwhelmed me. But what would you call destiny when you are an atheist like I am?

There is something tragic in destiny, it does not take desire into account. Desire is powerful, it opens and closes our paths, often without being conscious of it. I believe that you spend your life interpreting your own desire.



'world is a blues' cover artwork

Chain D.L.K.: Your route as a duo also met Jean-Michel Espitallier's. Can you tell us something about the seeds that gave life to "world is a blues"?

Kristoff K.Roll: We were in the "Jungle of Calais" to record dream stories. We thought that to find speakers in Urdu, Persian... four, was less far away than going to Pakistan, Iran, or Sudan. And we like to understand "the World", the "jungle of Calais" was one of those places where you can't forget political (and especially police) violence. We like to open our microphones in these places to challenge the "World", places where political sense explodes. All these people were locked up, and we wanted to listen to them. In the morning we were volunteers in an association helping refugees (precisely we cut huge quantities of vegetables to prepare meals), and in the afternoon we walked through the jungle of Calais, we met exiles, we established relations of sympathy and even friendships with them.

We realized that the dreams (during the night) in this camp looked like everyday life, it was a story of one's life, a document of reality. The unwanted gathering of people from very different countries, who, in order to understand each other, invented an idiom between their mother tongue, different Globish, and a few words of French learned by necessity, made us think of the plantations in America, and therefore of the roots of the blues. That's why we tried with our electroacoustic practice to make blues. An "experimental" blues, a hybrid genre.

And then for the texts, we asked Jean-Michel Espitallier and Anne Kawala to write them. Those of Jean-Michel were often written from encounters with refugees in places other than the jungle of Calais. We spent time talking together, the "together" means Jean-Michel and Kristoff K.Roll with Bedur, and then another day with Santi, and then in another place with Aram, ... And in the wake of the encounter, he wrote a text, and we (Carole and J-Kristoff) sculpted the voices, posed the sounds. So we spent time physically together with Jean-Michel Espitallier. And it goes on since, he is with us on stage to tell, to perform some of his texts. Jean-Michel says that the texts he wrote are 90% of the words spoken by Bedur, Reda, Aram, Santi, and that his work as a poet is, above all, a choice, a shaping of these sentences.

Chain D.L.K.: How did you involve Anne Kawala to turn refugees' testimonies into poetry?

Kristoff K.Roll: We had access to several "stories" that refugees must present to obtain political asylum. We knew Anna Kawala, especially her work as we had invited her to perform in "Sonorités", a festival that we organized every year, 14 times in total in Montpellier. Everything happened remotely. We gave her these texts (made anonymous) so that she could choose one that would give her the desire, the idea, the wish for a text. That's how she wrote *Dans ce même Fleuve* (In This Same River). This text is very different from those written by Jean Michel. We also worked with Barbara Metais Chastanier, here, in our own city, with other refugees, and this generated another text, which is not in the double album; once again the fact of writing gives way for very singular possible pieces of music.

Chain D.L.K.: From the musical/stylistic viewpoint, I appreciated the way you forged an interesting hybrid between blues, electroacoustic, and a sort of storytelling. Was it intentional or did improvisation play a role?

Kristoff K.Roll: Intentional? We can not say that because even if we had a playground at the beginning of the project, the contours are blurred and especially likely to be moved, even exploded. We started headlong with a common desire, but it is in "making" that things are built.

Despite everything, you can find the axis (guidelines) of our work: the game between the written and the improvised, the electroacoustic and instrumental work, the recorded word, and its possible narration. For "*world is a blues*", we added the desire to flirt with our musical love for the blues. And that's for us, a "step aside".

We practice total improvisation a lot, but here, these are "scripted" pieces that we try to perform at each concert. We had the idea of creating an experimental blues, and this blues still surprises us, and of course, it doesn't fit into any box. Furthermore, we wanted to move away from our electroacoustic practice, also with the idea of finding ourselves in a foreign situation, like the exiles... Being freed by having put these pieces on CD, now we interpret them more and more. We are just returning from a concert. Jean-Michel was not there, and it was J-Kristoff who took his role. And the guitarist Patrice Soletti was with us, his presence transformed some musical proposals. There were also two refugees who joined us on stage. That's what happens every time we play this project on stage, we have a guest musician from the city we're playing in and a few guests (refugees) who recently arrived in the city who perform an action of their choice. The choice of this action is free and is not always in the "officially artistic" field, for instance repairing a bicycle can be one ... Somehow, a "hospitality in the musical scene", as a way to continue the dialogue and the "make it together".



[Kristoff K Roll – World is a blues – Film Loran Chourrau on Vimeo](#)

Chain D.L.K.: In many moments of the attached notes, there are references to the different languages of the refugees, that somehow got poured into the aural part of this work. Would you say that languages built a barrier in the process of understanding refugees' stories and moods or became a proper instrument to better convey them?

Kristoff K.Roll: We like to work with foreign languages (other than French). Or with the French language spoken by foreigners with unexpected accents and grammar. This is the core of our work in "la bibliothèque des récits de rêve du monde" (Sound Library of Dream Stories) of "A l'Ombre des Ondes" (In the shadow of the waves).

Within the pieces of "world is a blues", let's take the example of "Reda, tous les permis". There is Jean-Michel's text which takes up the sentences actually said by Reda himself, Reda's voice in French (which he spoke only a little when we met him) from the recording of the moment spent together, and also the story of his trip in Arabic. As for the rhythm, it is built with samples of his breaths and sighs. Reda was overwhelming. In "Bedur, après", it's the same and in addition, Carole at one point plays in imitation with Bedur's voice. In "Santi, les petit bateaux", her voice appears at the end, as a confirmation of what was sung during the piece. This may seem like a repetition, but it's the text of the song that is a repetition of his words. This interplay between these different levels of language interests us.

Chain D.L.K.: Even if I liked the entire project and its parts, I personally enjoyed two tracks in particular. The first one is "Bedur, après"... any word about that?

Kristoff K.Roll: Bedur fled Syria and now lives in St Nazaire (France). Unlike Babak, Abu Algasim or Nala, we did not meet her in the jungle of Calais. In 2018, when we spoke with her, she was recounting her long, dangerous and disturbing journey. During this Odyssey, she crossed Syria, Turkey, the sea to Greece to arrive in France. She remembers the timeline and all the details in a very precise manner. This is what challenged Jean-Michel Espitallier, and he chose this form of text close to a list of chronological events which mixes subjects as different as the number of people on the boat, the duration of the walks or the birth of her child during the trip. This list is punctuated by his skill as a poet.

On the musical side, we have this repetitive and haunting riff played on the guitar like in the tradition of some blues, to which is added this more electric and *Rolling Stones*-like ternary riff. And then there's all this electroacoustic and electronic work of percussive sounds and orchestrations made of "trame" (wefts) and crackles. Carole also improvises blank noise frictions that evoke the sea. We also hear Bedur's own voice sampled, in French and Arabic, and then Carole also blends into her voice at times.

you, Vito, what seduces you in this piece?



courtesy of Laurent Avizou

Chain D.L.K.: I'd say its general atmosphere and the evocative power of the combination of lyrics and music, but your explanation made me appreciate it more. The second track I really enjoyed is "Aram"... would you like to provide more details on this track as well?

Kristoff K.Roll: Aram is Kurdish from Turkey. He fled Turkey and lives near Paris, where we met him. In this text, Jean-Michel Espitallier rather evokes the administrative absurdity and the logic of power, which means that whatever Aram does he is considered a terrorist because he is Kurdish. Even if the text joins common themes in traditional blues: problems and suffering with power and authority, the music is quite far from it. These are electronic loops that accelerate throughout the piece, while our three voices do not change tempo. Here again, samples of Aram's voice are integrated into the song.

Chain D.L.K.: Are you bringing "A l'Ombre des Ondes" on live stage? If not, are you planning to do that?

Kristoff K.Roll: *A l'Ombre des Ondes* is a proposal for headphones, and the idea is to play it in public spaces outside of theaters. We have a "device" made of 80 headphones. The headset allows listening intimacy, with these sounds in the hollow of the ear, while being in collective listening. It is also for us the equivalent of the circus tent, it allows a good quality of sound in outdoor environments. We also played this project indoors, but in places other than theaters, in the "Palais de

la Porte Dorée" or the POP barge, like we did during the "Festival d'Automne" (Autumn festival) in Paris. On this occasion, a scenographer designed the space and two light designers proposed a moving light evolution over the duration of each session. We also play indoors when, during the day of the performance, it's raining.

Chain D.L.K.: Any work in progress, or maybe sequels of "A l'Ombre des Ondes"?

Kristoff K.Roll: Yes, a new version of *A l'Ombre des Ondes* is on going. We are preparing *Les Ombres de la Nuit* (The Shadows of the night), a concert/performance that will last all night. The listeners will arrive in the evening and leave the next morning. We are preparing it for next summer. In that case, in addition to the practical questions of welcoming listeners lying down, the challenge is to play over a very long period and to take into account the moments of sleep each one. This implies choices of dream stories adapted to this long sonic journey, and densities of musical writings (improvised writings) will have to evolve.

This project has accompanied us for many years. We are never tired of recording dream stories, meeting people, and listening to those voices. The dream, this creation made by the dreamer, is normally addressed only to one's own self, it is a communication "to yourself from yourself". There is something in this creative expression beyond any practical injunction, any communication, any expectation, any evaluation that challenges us, something that brings these dreamers closer to the "independent artist".

But we have plenty of other adventures in parallel. We realized with Jérémie Scheidler four "*VidéoPoèmes*" (VideoPoems) which are visible here: <http://kristoff-k-roll.net/site/index.php/vidéopoems/>. And we are about to make the 5th one.

In 1997, in our piece "*Des travailleurs de la nuit, à l'amie des objets*" (From the workers of the night, to the friend of the objects), we worked with a Rwandan dancer, Nido. On the set, she danced to women's lyrics. Last year, for the duo's anniversary, we revived this "Danse de la parole" (Dance of the spoken (words) and we are going to have it as a video. We are preparing a plastic device to present all of these VidéoPoèmes in a dedicated installation. Also, we regularly practice improvised music. Currently, we perform as a quartet with baritone saxophonist Daunik Lazro and pianist Sophie Agnel: "Quartet un peu tendre" (Sweet a bit Quartet). It's a pleasure to play together.

And this "Bohemia electrónica... nunca duerme", a "théâtre sonore" piece that we wouldn't like to shelve because it's a manifesto of the musical style we've been creating over the years.

Visit **Kristoff K.Roll** on the web : kristoff-k-roll.net