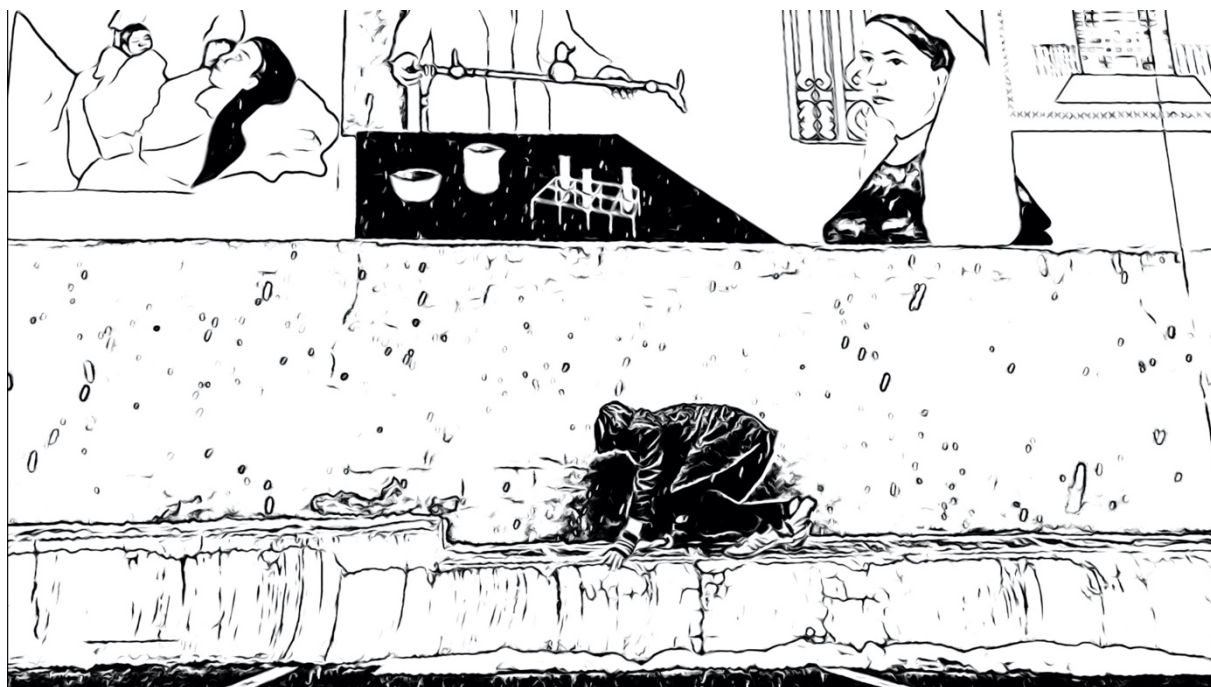


**Eliot Cardinaux & Jeb Bishop**  
**“Die Letzte Posaune”**

Interview with Sean Ali



Link: <https://youtu.be/P4tyaD2xNBE>

Sean Ali and Eliot Cardinaux are long time friends who have collaborated creatively together on a number of projects since their initial meeting in Dayton, OH back in 2001. Over the years they have performed together in various ensembles in NYC, shared and discussed each other's poetry, and have been involved in publishing projects and recording releases. Their most recent collaboration is *The Scaffold in the Rain* (The Bodily Press, 2019), which features select pairings of paintings and poetry.

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**Sean Ali:** Watching this video, I was struck by how the sonic and visual aspects are integrated together. The sound and video permeate one another so that you feel like you are neither watching a short film with a score nor a music video. I know that your background lies primarily in music and poetry. What prompted you to explore video in creating “Die Letzte Posaune?”

**Eliot Cardinaux:** Well, the first video I made started as a way for me to get the word out about the release of my first record, *American Thicket*, roughly 5 years ago. I didn't actually want it to feel like a marketing tool though, so I made a video that told a story visually, I guess you could say, abstractly and expressively. I wound up liking the way the poetic imagery in my music seemed to be charged with new threads of meaning, when juxtaposed with visual imagery, and so it began. Later down the road I experimented more, without placing a need or a deadline on the process. I always liked going out into the world and searching for things to film. I made a video to accompany almost the entirety of a solo record I made back in 2018, titled *Sweet Beyond Witness*.

“Die Letzte Posaune” came out of the need to continue, and also to collaborate while in isolation. Jeb Bishop and I collaborated remotely on it. Not only did Jeb provide the trombone tracks, his compositional, textual, and audio advice were essential in how it turned out. I sometimes feel, depending on certain projects, that the music is not quite enough for me on its own, that it needs something else, and so, in this case, once the music felt finished, I turned to video to try and create a groundedness in the work. In this case it was me, my own body, standing against a mural that I discovered in Northampton, Massachusetts, near where I live. That was the first time I had, I guess you could say, “acted” in one of my videos.

**SA:** The piece features an interweaving of three connected but distinct creative processes: music/sound, poetry, and video. Were the three created in isolation and then brought together, or was the process more integrated at the inception? How do these three modes of expression inform and interpenetrate each other?

**EC:** Well, I’m constantly at work in the field of poetry. I’m typically looking for things to do with the poems I’m writing, keeping an eye out for images, the content of the outer world, “in town,” I guess. Meaning, potential subjects or settings for a video. I think this particular piece was an example of things arising, then following the process as it unfolds, which is typical for me. I wrote the text first, which incorporated a poem from my previous collection, *Around the Faded Sun*. This recontextualized the poem for me, which was written after Paul Celan. It was a way of unpacking, for me, the meaning of the poem by placing it within a larger textual context. The Biblical references in the text (“Steal Away,” “Die Letzte Posaune”) were an interesting confluence of things. I had a basic track, which was a drone, with the text overlaid on top of it. The poem after Celan was read phonetically backwards, & then the audio was reversed, thus setting it a part in a lens of “future past,” as David Lynch might say. When I reached out to Jeb Bishop about potentially collaborating on it, by overlaying some trombone, Jeb, who in addition to being a musician, is a German-English translator, alerted me to the fact that in the Martin Luther German translation of the Bible, the word used in the phrase, “at sound of the last trumpet,” is actually “Posaune,” which means “trombone.” The entire passage seemed to fit, & so I overlaid the German Biblical excerpt over another part of the English text I had already written. Already the element of collaboration had opened doorways I hadn’t anticipated going into this project to begin with.

Jeb overlaid several trombone tracks, and when the audio was done, I started scouting for potential video sites. I knew it was going to snow one day, and since snow is a recurring theme in Celan’s work, I decided to make use of my surroundings thematically. I walked into the center of Northampton, Massachusetts, where I live, and wandered in front of a mural I had never really noticed, or sat and regarded as a work of art, until then. I found a shot that encompassed three or four figures: a mother with her child (presumably a midwife, standing over her), a woman with scientific instruments on a table in front of her, and a woman in a nun’s habit. These seemed to best fit the thematic material in the text, both what I had written, and the Biblical German, as well as alluding to themes in Celan’s work. I found myself creeping along the ledge up against the wall in front of the mural in the snow. I allowed for some time to pass to get a shot of the wall on its own, and I also stood still against the wall below the trinity of women, walking off when I felt I had stood there long enough. I had an idea of what I was going to do, but it was very intuitive, and it’s difficult to trace the inception of any one idea, theme, or medium, as the chicken or the egg.

**SA:** One of the most intriguing and enigmatic parts of the video are your bodily movements. Were the decisions about when and where to stand and move made intuitively, or was there some sort of choreography planned in advance? Is the viewer meant to see you as you are, or are you “acting” out a character/archetype?

**EC:** The choreography was loosely planned. I had an idea to overlay myself standing, walking, & crawling along the wall below the mural. It was pretty intuitive; something I wanted to do. It had to fit the frame, of course.

I think the question of the archetype is an interesting one, especially represented by one’s own self in one’s own body. I think of it more as myself, but playing a part. Maybe the idea is

that a character is never just a character. Something like a persons for that particular piece. Is it me? Yes. Is it also acting? Yes. Does the act also frighten me? It kind of does. & is there room for me, or anyone else, between these images and the music/words? I really hope so.

**SA:** During the pandemic months, many musicians and artists collaborated remotely for the sake of safety and preventing the spread of the coronavirus. Was your collaboration with Jeb borne of a desire to create and collaborate because of or despite the circumstances of the pandemic? I know most artists would typically prefer in-person collaboration. However, obstacles, challenges, and limitations often stimulate creativity in new and unexpected ways. Did you have any experiences like this whilst creating the video? Could you speak about how the events of the past year impacted your creative process?

**EC:** For sure. Thank you for asking. I feel like we're quick to forget. The pandemic had a major impact, not only in the creative process, and remote collaboration methods, but also on the content itself. I felt stuck without the means to share in what I was doing with other artists, longing for a spark. Jeb said some things when I reached out to him that reminded me how much collaborations seem to open up my thinking, not only about the process, the art & the craft, but also about the content I'm working with.

Jeb is an old friend. We used to live in the same neighborhood in Boston before I left for Western MA. I had never thought to collaborate with him, say, on a multitracking project before then. It was always playing together at clubs in the area, or getting together for listening sessions at his place, or trying out new compositions at mine. This remote collaboration we were forced into by the isolation of the pandemic, certainly somehow allowed for us to collaborate in ways we might not have before, but also continuing our relationship. I want to be careful not to put a silver lining on the last year.

Some ways in which the remote method affected the outcome, however, can't be taken for granted. Jeb recording enough trombone takes, for instance, that it started to make sense to overlay them. We created, in the earlier section of the composition, a dialogue between two muted trombones and the drone I had created by processing a decaying piano chord. Here, the trombones are slightly off pitch, creating a beautiful rub, which Jeb said was incidental, but really fits. In the later section, Jeb created a warmer bed of 3 unmuted trombone tracks, which we decided to allow to enter almost subliminally, and then slowly raise to a higher volume, suddenly enveloping the sound world of the piece. That was a great idea by Jeb, a studio technique that I might not have been as open to had we been simply recording ourselves improvising together in the same room, trying to get an accurate depiction of what happened live.

Doing it remotely also allowed me to step back from the moment a little bit. I had new options. For instance, the poem towards the beginning of the piece, which I transcribed and spoke phonetically in retrograde, and then reversed. I never would have been able to do that from a live performer's standpoint.

**SA:** It's always exciting and refreshing to see artists exploring mediums outside of their main practice. Not only are you making new material, but you're recontextualizing and finding new relevances for our art of improvised music. Are there other creative avenues that you wish to explore? What do you see as the next steps for your poetry and music? What role do you feel your art will have as we tread anxiously and optimistically into this so-called post-pandemic era?

**EC:** I read a quote by Andrei Tarkovsky today that really resonated with me.

*"Art is one of the most selfless of human endeavors. Art is prayer. It's my prayer. And if my prayer becomes a prayer for others, then my art becomes intimately others'."*

I've been thinking a lot about the idea of an audience these days. For me, an audience, a listener, a reader, a witness, over the past year, has been an unknown, anonymous entity, at least outside of my circle of close friends. The last year has taught me that I will continue

making music even when it seems that there's no one there to hear it. That I may write poetry that somebody will stumble on, discover, outside of my telling. This has become a source of great comfort for me. Tarkovsky's idea of intimacy, of art belonging intimately, not only to its creator, but to its witnesses; that it can become wholly theirs. This is inspiring to me because it takes the idea of selfhood, of self-image, of persona, off the table.

Lately I've been drawn to pen and paper again, after years working on a computer. I'm writing by hand again. Not only in my poetry. I've also experimented with line drawings. Not necessarily to share. Mostly for myself. Not looking at the paper, letting my hand wander over the figures and forms I'm observing. I feel this detachment serves a connection with feeling, movement, and touch. I think this also may have arisen from my having returned to the piano, with much more regularity, during the past year and a half. I had little to no contact with other musicians, venues, and the like, for so long, I had to retune my relationship with the instrument, and with music itself. I feel like I'm in my body, sometimes in sudden ways. It can be quite jarring, returning to the world. I think what makes life so interesting is the fact that we can't control everything around us. Easing into wonder, even during the most mundane moments, has been a recent unexpected gesture towards a new way of thinking for me. Thank you for the wonderful questions.

*Interview made between June and July 2021.*