

Flin van Hemmen interviewed by Jozef Dumoulin in June 2021 for the release of [You Can Know Where the Bombs Fell \(n/n 0019\)](#)

In his third release on Neither/Nor Records Flin van Hemmen pushes further into the world of post-production and processing of recorded sound. Treating recorded sound as a found object or as malleable clay with which he assembles and molds abstract shapes, Flin creates a distinctive language which feels at once intimate and enigmatic.

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Flin van Hemmen - production, sampling, various instruments



Jozef Dumoulin: What has been the procedure? Where do the sounds come from, how is each element generated?

Flin van Hemmen: While obsessively mixing and editing my trio record *Casting Spells* for bass, guitar, and piano, I became intrigued by looping small segments or 'sentences'. In deciding to follow this intrigue, I'd start a new track based on these segments, and would build it up from there, adding layers and so forth. At times I shortened the loops to where you cannot discern their sources, perhaps giving the impression of using electronics. That became the foundational idea behind 'you can know where the bombs fell'.

JD: What's first, the smaller parts or the bigger idea? How did you structure the bigger shape of the entire record?

FvH: I rarely have a bigger idea :). I look for a little element that lures me in and then develop it further. Ideally the bigger idea writes itself. As far as the record goes, the bigger idea has to do with an ideal shape, which is quite a puzzle and can take a long time to get right. In that sense the bigger shape is everything, even causing me to have to withdraw pieces that somehow don't fit.

JD: What do you define as music? Where's the border? Does it matter?



FvH: Whether it be a field recording or a chord progression, I use all available sound elements as building blocks. There is this 'sweet spot' that I look for where these various aspects are integrated, inseparable. This excites me, there is something magical about it when it all clicks. The only way to take borders down is to include elements from both sides, and fresh territory follows..

JD: Is it important for you to know that what you make is music?

FvH: What I make is so deeply informed by all the music I have absorbed in my life. I invite all to be a part of it, directly or indirectly, so for the outcome to be 'not music' would be very odd to me, or a point of view that misses what I'm offering.

JD: I've already used voices, samples and bits of field recordings etc. in my music, but working with you, it became like a central theme. When I met you, you were a jazz drummer. What happened?

FvH: I see what you mean.. For a long time, I found myself embedded in a scene that welcomed me and I welcomed it. Then I moved to NY and things changed, got a little slippery, in direction, in career. At some point a vitality went missing, like a chapter in my life had fizzled out. After some feelings of withdrawal, I realized I had to redirect, focus on my own music more, maybe even be a leader.

A big moment for me was to have the 'audacity' to play the piano in my group. This was not about me being a drummer anymore, and the career that went with it. Instead, it was about making music regardless of instrument. Around that time, I got into field recordings, and using them as musical ideas. All these borders and identities were dissolving, slowly but surely. It was not an easy process for me at all, I had many misgivings, but seeing where it took me, I can only be thankful for it. Meanwhile, the drums are still there, and I love playing them. I can see now that having an outside perspective gave me the space to explore freely - no 'scene' or label to please.

JD: Working this way, I personally get a strong feeling that I'm actively working with subconscious content, be it mine or a collective one; a lot more than when I'm working on music-music. How is that for you?

FvH: Absolutely! Perhaps because the music is somewhat undefined, your mind has less to latch onto. Maybe it's like the mind gets bypassed, a short cut to what is beyond the mind. To closing your eyes, and letting it reverberate, simply. Very simple and very hard (for 'trained listeners'). I notice an ease in appreciating art that is outside my own field, be it visual art or dance. My first thoughts do not concern its technical aspects, or it's perhaps 'unachievable brilliance' or whatever. I just observe openly and see where it takes me. I want to make music that has that potential.

JD: Is it ok to make a difference between the music of this record and music-music, and how would you describe that difference?

FvH: Essentially, I don't see a difference, as the same laws apply- color, rhythm, tension and release and so on. One may be more defined, confirmed and in many cases exhausted.), but in the end they are entangled, they are mutually informed, they go hand in hand. Perhaps 'music-music' offers a little

more clarity, and this stuff ask the listener not to demand a clear listening path, but to create his own.

JD: Could you describe the most important criteria you apply when forging the music?

FvH: Finding an element that spikes my curiosity, or a little nook that pleasantly puzzles me. Other times it's a 'happy accident' that draws my attention. Like I'm closing in on a secret, the radar starts flashing. My sense of beauty steers me the most. Lyricism has many forms, we all have our unique sense of it, and that's what I want to follow, how this singular thing deserves attention. The element of 'chance' is also a big one. when adding a field recording, I never quite know how it will work out. If there's something there that fascinates me (be it 'pretty' or 'confusing' or what not) I switch from this random act to where I start to consciously edit. It's funny to see this seemingly contradictory dance unfold before my eyes. Hone in on what works, take out what doesn't, mess around with the possibilities my 'Daw' has to offer, plugins and what not. Forging by trying things out, forging without knowing where it will lead.

JD: Do you think that it is possible to improvise music that feels and sounds the same as the music of this record, and is doing so something that could interest you?

FvH: Good question.. As improvisors we 'search'. This music is more about staying patient with something that was already found. Not rushing to develop or change. Finding this liminal space of not-changing while not being stagnant either. It's a subtle excitement. And when we do decide to move from A to B, how do we do that without the almost inevitable 'search phase'? Another is to resist building towards a peak. This is so engrained in our improvisatory makeup, but can we resist and explore these more ambient shifts.. In the ambient world these types of 'changeless' improvisations are quite common. So now I'm scrambling to distinguish this record from ambient music. Perhaps the question is: is there a point to improvising in the vein of this record, or do we save improvisation for other goals..?

JD: What is very often more determinative for a creative process is all the things we want to avoid, the don'ts and no-go's. Could you describe some of those relative to this work?

FvH: Yes, true.. a few things come to mind. Dynamically I wanted to have it be steady, no overt build-ups etc. As a listener I sometimes find all those peaks and valleys distracting. I wanted to just soar in one place, build in that way, like a slow moving movie, where the peaks and valleys are felt more than heard. Also, though we had recorded about half the tracks with me on drums, I started to realize this music wasn't about that texture. It seemed to erode that which is specific about my direction. Joe Branciforte noted this carefully when I went to show him my mixes. I took his suggestion to steer away from the temptation to want to add this element of what is my main axe. It was such a relief as well as an epiphany.. Dare to be specific, avoid unnecessary temptation, avoid irrelevant agendas, serve the music as best you can.

JD: What's the relationship between making this music-object and playing the drums, alone or together with others? Are both practices communicating in any way, and are you consciously studying or using this relationship?

FvH: I love switching between things, having all these ideas and projects ready to go and hop between them. It keeps it all fresh. They inform one and other, for sure. Again, when you walk out of a museum, you see the world differently. It's deeply informing. You get such a fresh look at your own stuff. Tease out your own irrelevant agendas, that which erodes the very reason to make music or why music is important to us. I believe in many cases we are not even aware these agendas are there, it takes work and a willingness to find them. For instance, my reluctance to do without the drums as I just mentioned, to make that decision to take them out was sticky even once it was clear they didn't serve. To discriminate what's essential, and what's not.



JD: I could say something like: the music remains very often very narrative, with phrases and a development from point A to point B, whereas on other moments it's more about setting a vibe, describing a state without the need or urge to go anywhere else. Does that resonate with you, and if yes, is it a conscious attempt to have both attitudes on board? And how do both relate to each other?

FvH: I see what you mean.. It's all about these relationships, micro and macro, resolutions, some logical, others perplexing. And then there is 'just staying there'. I suppose I'm juggling these to a place where I feel it serves both the moment and the bigger picture. I have this strange idea that given the ingredients gathered, there is an ideal outcome. And while this may very well be an illusion,

it's what spurs me on, like trying to solve a riddle or like going on a hike and needing to know what's over the next peak.

JD: Was making this music a way to archive material you already had in mind, or a means to explore new ground and paths?

FvH: It began with the idea of archiving a handful of compositions written on the piano. It wasn't my intention to then create new work from there, but the process of mixing and editing got out of hand and launched me into a whole new world. Many of the pieces never made it to the record as recorded but served as a foundation from which I went to work. To this day there is a sense of loss herein. Some of them sound really nice as they were but like with the forgone element of my beloved drums, I had to conclude this was not their place.

JD: do you have referential music in mind when working on your music, and if so is it something you embrace or fight against?

FvH: In a broad sense, all music is my reference, how can it be any other way. But artists who follow their own voice more than what is fashionable always jump out to me. It's supportive and confirming in our own journey.

I think there is a point in the process though where the music itself becomes its own reference. For instance, there were certain pieces on *Casting Spells* that defined the direction I was going to commit to, and consequently that which I was to abandon (drums, etc). All of a sudden there is this feeling of 'this is what this record should be to about'.

A similar thing happened with *You Can Know Where the Bombs Fell*. A single piece opened up, for me, new territory and I realized that it could be an anchor around which to build a record of its own. Furthermore, I want mention 'object-oriented' art, such as sculpture and painting, the visual arts. Walking around a sculpture and slowly understanding or feeling its message. There is no development or change, but the change happens within you. Repetition comes with a silence, and this silence allows us to open up to its hidden qualities, or perhaps your own. My frequent visits to the Metropolitan Museum have had a direct influence on this work, I think!

JD: Where would you like this path to bring you?

FvH: That I don't know. It's a good creative spot for the time being, a place I have not exhausted yet. It feels very new still and am looking forward what comes next.

JD: What does this music do to your body and is that something you use during the process of making it?

FvH: When music guides me towards an inner experience, I tend to trust it the most. If it doesn't provoke a visceral feeling, I'm not going to invest in it. When the body responds I know I have a starting point.