

Cross Platform

Sound in other media. This month: Italian duo Tu m' guide Dan Warburton through the liquid borders between electronica, Improv, Duchampian readymades and video



Mutts R us: Emiliano Romanelli (left) and Rossano Polidoro aka Tu m', with stills from their video art

Though they're happy in the idyllic surroundings of a hilltop village "from where we can see most of central Italy", Tu m' – Rossano Polidoro, born in 1970, and Emilio Romanelli, nine years his junior – have constantly set their sights further afield. The words "passion", "love" and "curious" appear frequently in their email dispatches from Città Sant' Angelo, Pescara, where a shared love of new music brought the two together in 1998. "We liked Otomo Yoshihide, David Shea and Christian Marclay, that synthesis of all the music we loved, from cartoon soundtracks to Balinese gamelan." Though they both played guitars and saxophones in jazz and Improv outfits, a passion for sampling and cheap electronics eventually led to Tu m'. "Using samples is just part of it – not many people realise that the art of 'quotation' has been going on for a long time; it's not just a prerogative of 'digital' civilisation. Marcel Duchamp's concept of readymades influenced us a lot. We like to quote his observation that since all the colours an artist uses are ready-to-use manufactured products, all the paintings in the world are readymades. That seems to be a good summary of much of today's music." The name Tu m' itself refers to Duchamp's 1918 painting of the same name, which the artist described as "a kind of inventory of my preceding work rather than a painting in itself".

In barely three years Tu m' have made an impressive number of contacts in the world of electronic and improvised music, all the while downloading as much free software as they can get their hands on, for use on what they endearingly describe as "two old laptops, a little bit broken". "It may sound like a cliché," they continue, "but glitches represent for us a source of real innovation in the music of the new millennium. They affect both melody and rhythm in their deep structure, highlighting micro-variations that we explore. Structural faults are good starting points for our pieces – finding an 'error' in a loop or in a track is a wonderful surprise, and that error becomes a source for our ideas."

In 2001 their music came to the attention of Chris Cutler, who distributed their limited edition CD-R *Phone Book* in November of that year. The first 'official' Tu m' album, *01*, appeared at the same time on Jason Kahn's Cut imprint. In June 2002 the Portuguese label Grain Of Sound released *Nine Songs*, and a double 3" CD *Blue In Green* appeared

three months later on Aesova. By the end of the year, two further Tu m' releases had appeared on ERS/Staalplaat and BOXmedia.

"The Futurists, Varèse, electronic and concrète music, but also jazz, Ambient and laptop musics are all part of our background and cross-pollinate each other without our realising it. Our musical interests are always changing." Those interests range from noise, which Polidoro points out is "now accepted by audiences as part and parcel of the contemporary musical aesthetic" to pure pop. Though they describe their recent release on Fällt, *Pop Involved*, as "simply investigating the pleasure of melody", it's a cunningly crafted piece of work, and like Fennesz's much-acclaimed *Endless Summer* (whose influence Tu m' affectionately acknowledge by calling one of the tracks "The End Of The Summer"), further proof that cutting edge electronica can appeal to a wide public without compromising its artistic integrity. "Playing good melodies can be as difficult as showing off your avant garde chops," Romanelli states. *Pop Involved* successfully manages to do both.

Parallel to their musical activities, Tu m' are increasingly involved in the world of video and site-specific installations, notably with artists Claudio Sinatti, Bianco & Valente and Cane CapoVolto. "Our visuals are an integral part of our work and they're closely linked to our music. You might say they represent our music made visible. In our videos, music and image find themselves in a confrontation whose ultimate goal is fusion into a unique entity. We believe that sound itself has strong components of matter that can be translated abstractly into forms and colours into the mind of the listener. Exhibitions are an opportunity for us to project our imagination into form in a neutral space, the gallery. We've noticed that many different and contrasting stylistic aspects live within us, from dada to Pop Art, from Optical Art to Neo Concretismo Inoggettuale Italiano. Antonio Calderara [1903-78] and Riccardo Guarnieri [born 1933] are two artists who have really inspired us. We love the chromatic choices they make in their works – really very intense. We see many young artists who are inspired, maybe without being aware of the fact, by the work of the great masters of the 1960s, people like Winfred Gaul, Frank Stella, Ellsworth Kelly and Ettore Spalletti. What these artists have in common is the fact that they work with a few colours, sometimes

just one. The colour really seems to go way beyond its representation, not merely communicating but plunging totally into the space surrounding us."

Curious to learn how other musicians could react to their visuals, Polidoro and Romanelli created the Web label Tu m'p3 to invite other musicians to compose soundtracks for their images. "The soundtracks are free download and everything is strictly non-profit. The reaction we've had from musicians from different areas has been great". The list of more than 120 musicians who have submitted material include not only electronica notables such as Scanner, Kim Cascone and DJ Spooky but also free improvisors as diverse in orientation as Bbob Rainey and Ned Rothenberg, and alternative guitar heroes David Grubbs and Alan Licht. Never content to sit on their hill and admire the view though, Rossano and Emiliano are still scouting for talent. "We'd like to work with Björk: for us, she's one of the most intelligent artists of the past few years."

Tu m' also curate a CD-R label, Mr Mutt Records – another reference to Duchamp, who signed his infamous 1917 readymade *Fountain* "R Mutt". Following the first release, Scanner's *Publicphono*, discs are forthcoming from TV Pow, Nathan Michel, Donna Summer and Christopher Willits. Three further Tu m' albums are due out shortly: *Pink Shark* (Phthalo) showcases Polidoro's and Romanelli's "passion for 80s disco and pop", while *Tu m' And The Magical Mystery Orchestra* (Aesova) is the pair's homage to minimalism, a project realised in collaboration with an ensemble of classical instruments, whose polished Reichian sonorities are then refracted through the prism of the Tu m' laptops. Later this summer they will also reveal an interest in minuscule sonics on the extraordinarily beautiful *Broken. Distant. Fragrant.*, the result of "a long year exchanging recordings by mail" with Californian sound artist Steve Roden. The sheer diversity and creativity of their work is remarkable, and Polidoro and Romanelli show no sign of letting up. "We're really full of music, both to listen to and to realise, and we're always short of time. We're really very curious." □ *Pop Involved* and *Tu m' And The Magical Mystery Orchestra* are out this month on Fällt/Ferric and Aesova respectively. *Broken. Distant. Fragrant.* with Steve Roden is out next month on Rosssbin. Tu m' Website: www.tu-m.com