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Nurse With Wound Plays Rare Concert in Moscow

By Timothy Misir

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Steven Stapleton (right) and Andrew Liles.

Steven Stapleton, who goes by the moniker Nurse With Wound, or NWW, played a rare concert in Moscow over the weekend and told The Moscow Times about punk priests in the city.

"It is such a strange place. Such a culture shock," Stapleton begins, as he speaks about Moscow. That something is still shocking to him surprises me, as this is a man who has put out close to 100 releases of psychedelic, experimental sound collages and improvisations since his 1979 debut album "Chance Meeting on a Dissecting Table of a Sewing Machine and an Umbrella," recorded as a trio, unrehearsed in 6 hours.

His music is hard to describe, but is almost always surrealistic, cinematic and certainly unpredictable. The NWW catalog is always an entry into the unknown, and the NWW list, a list of influences that was included with their debut album that covers a wide range of underground styles from the 1960s to the 1980s, has been a long-time starting point

for music obsessives with a taste for the avant-garde and bizarre to explore something new.

He almost never performed live but returned to the stage in 2006 and still plays very sporadically. "I was out of the gigging circuit for forever, really, apart from a few stupid live improvisations. I always thought that if I was going to do something live, it had to be something special. I was thinking about multimedia, choreography, dancers, and making a big affair. And then some of my friends started playing live. Basically, I went along to their shows, and I thought, 'well, this is easy! This is no problem.' I just got the bug from seeing Current 93 and Coil doing it, and I thought 'well, I can do that!'"

"We still use very primitive equipment, so it has nothing to do with the technology. Just the fact that I had it in my head that I had to be completely in control of the situation, like I would be in the studio, and I thought that I could never attain that, so I never bothered to play live ... And now we love it because every show is completely different and there is improvisation. "

Nurse With Wound's concert in Moscow on Sunday at Moscow Hall saw Stapleton play a blisteringly loud 75-minute largely improvised set that went from dark ambient to hard techno to drone, but the soundscapes segued into each other with ease. Stapleton played the harmonica, steel guitar, and various other little trinkets; he even rapped a little, though problems with the sound equipment were frequent. Sharing the stage with him were Andrew Liles on guitar and Colin Potter who provided live processing and electronics. Unfortunately, a return to the stage for an encore was abruptly cut short when the equipment failed.

Famously reclusive, Stapleton moved to a goat farm in Ireland from London after becoming a father, and after both his partner and him were separately mugged. "It is 12 kilometers to the nearest shop but it has not changed my music at all in any way. It has just given me, if anything, more time to think and be free of all the information that I do not want that was bombarding me when I was living in London."

"You must remember that I am quite primitive. I do not have a computer. And I have never looked at the Internet. Never even looked once. You know, most of the information around today is through the Internet, and I do not even see it."

His new album for the Rotorelief label is a reworking of tracks for Sand, an obscure German psychedelic band from the 1960s. He explains, "I honestly do not like any of the music going around now. But I really try hard. I have got a really active mind and ears and I want to, I really, really want to. But I keep finding myself going back to the early 70s, or earlier. I have many, many people out there, and fans of NWW and friends, who, when they hear of anything interesting, they always send it to me. So I hear a lot of new music but nothing, nothing makes me enthusiastic. Sorry about that. I really wish it was not like that, because I have a great thirst for new music, but there is just very very little out there that is doing it for me."

Stapleton has good memories of the city, having played Moscow in 2007. This time, he looks forward to "just ambling around like tourists" and visiting Izmailovo market again in the few days that he is here. He asks me if I am familiar with a monk in Moscow that is a fan of NWW, explaining that he attended his last concert and invited Stapleton to his cathedral, which he accepted.

"It was so shocking because he was standing in the middle of all this beautiful gold and opulence, and he was blessing women coming in with children. And we walked in, and he beckoned us to come towards him, and he has these long brown robes on. And there was a queue of about 20 old women with little children. He pulled out of his tunic a bunch of Nurse With Wound records, and he wanted me to sign them as he was blessing them! It was just like shooing them away and was like, dedicate this one to me and I thought 'this is incredible!'"

"And he said 'you have to come and meet the top priest, the top monk of the church.' And he took us to a tiny little old man, a tiny little old man who was like 80 years old. And the first thing this guy says to me, he said 'punk.' The young monk gestured to the priest, so he lifted up his tunic.. and he had a Clash t-shirt on underneath. And he said 'I am a punk!' I could not believe that. I mean, this is the head of a church! So I thought that was astounding. I came away glowing from that meeting in Moscow."

Here's hoping that Stapleton's stay this time around will be even more bizarre.

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