

Cupped Ears

Fred Frith

FRED FRITH is a songwriter, composer, improviser, and multi-instrumentalist best known for the reinvention of the electric guitar that began with *Guitar Solos* in 1974. He learned his craft as both improviser and composer playing in rock bands, notably Henry Cow, and creating music in the recording studio. Much of his compositional output has been commissioned by choreographers and filmmakers, but his work has also been performed by Ensemble Modern, Hieronymus Firebrain, Arditti Quartet, Ground Zero, Robert Wyatt, Bang on a Can All Stars, Concerto Köln, and Rova Sax Quartet, among many others. He continues to perform internationally, most recently with Lotte Anker, Evelyn Glennie, Ikue Mori, Mike Patton, and his latest band, Cosa Brava, whose first CD—*Ragged Atlas*—was released in 2010 on the Intakt label. Fred is the subject of Nicolas Humbert and Werner Penzels' award-winning documentary film *Step Across the Border*. <http://www.fredfrith.com/>

I MET PAULINE when I began teaching at Mills College in 1999. I'm ashamed to admit I knew very little about her at the time, a glaring gap which my friend Willie Winant was quick to fill, plying me with scores, articles and recordings to bring me up to speed. I soon came to appreciate her greatly, not only as the radical musical and sonic pioneer that she undoubtedly is, but as a colleague who goes quickly to the heart of the matter—with humor, persistence, and imagination. Meanwhile we have performed, researched, read thesis papers, dined, laughed, and argued together, and while I still have no first-hand experience of Deep Listening, anyone who spends any time with Pauline will soon become a deeper listener! The following stories are snapshots taken with the aid of the notebooks that I have kept since the early 1970s, as well as memories that have grown indelible with re-telling over the years. Re-searching the memory bank has been a journey of discovery for which I'm most grateful.

§§§

Improvisation Workshop notes, 1993.¹ “The qualities of a good improviser are not dissimilar to the qualities you would look for in a friend. A good listener, who knows when to speak and when to be quiet; someone who shares your basic values but who brings a unique perspective to bear when needed; loyal and supportive, but not afraid to be critical or have a different point of view; someone who brings out the best in you; above all, someone who’s seen the worst of you but didn’t run away! Patient, flexible, ready to have fun or be serious or both, and who knows that there are matters far greater and more important than either of you.”

§§§

North Yorkshire Moors, 1950s. When I was a kid we would sometimes spend a day on the moors, a windswept and treeless desolation emerging from the rolling farmland of North Yorkshire. Up in the vast expanse of heather I loved to fall backwards in a straight line, with eyes closed and arms outstretched. One minute the wind, anything from a whistle to a howl, the next a perfect stillness, accompanied by a drone of flies and bees and obscure crawlings. In this secret place I could still hear the occasional asthmatic bleat of sheep straggled sporadically to the horizon, or the cry of a curlew, the epitome of solitude.

§§§

Almost nothing, 1970. After previously having read John Cage’s *Silence* and learned that any sound could now be considered music, I heard Luc Ferrari’s composition *Presque Rien #1: Lever du Jour au Bord de la Mer*, an unadorned and beautifully spacious recording of a beach at dawn.² By the time I moved to New York almost ten years later, framing

1 I’ve been leading improvisation workshops for musicians and non-musicians of all ages since receiving an invitation from Ferdinand Richard and the Festival MIMI in 1986.

2 This recording was released as part of Deutsche Grammophon’s Avant-Garde box set, an important part of my musical education at the time. It has since been re-issued on a number of different CD compilations, and available in three parts on YouTube: “Luc Ferrari - Presque Rien No. 1 (1 of 3),” accessed December 27, 2011, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=z2aWEM1nnNg>.

environmental sounds as music had become almost fashionable. Finding myself wondering why these “sound pieces” seemed to be mostly about nature, I wrote an article³ attempting to describe the sounds heard around my Lower East Side neighborhood. The last sentence reads: “Oh, one thing I forgot...the sound of cockroaches scurrying when you turn on the light.”

§§§

Working on the soundtrack for *Rivers and Tides*,⁴ 1996. In one scene, Andy Goldsworthy is in Newfoundland in the early morning, creating a sculpture using icicles. Because his fingers are so cold, he keeps dropping pieces of ice, and sometimes when they hit the ground they make a resonant sound that reminds me of a marimba. Before long, sampled “ice marimba” takes its place alongside guitar, violin and berimbau. What you see is what you hear...

§§§

Less is more, 1986. Sally Potter⁵ and Peter Mettler are two directors from whom I’ve learned a great deal about life in general and film music in particular. They have taught me, among other things, to pare down my contributions to the absolute minimum. Sally told me that, as with all other aspects of filmmaking, it’s often about what you leave out—“the

3 The article was published in a magazine called *Musics* in the UK. I’m grateful to Clive Bell for digging out a copy for me after thirty years! See Fred Frith, “New York Sounds,” *Musics* 23 (November 1979):27.

4 *Rivers and Tides* is a documentary film about the work of Andy Goldsworthy, directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer, which went on to win international acclaim. My work on the soundtrack started by listening to audio recordings of what was happening on location during the shooting. It was from this source that I derived not only the “ice marimba” but also much of the other material used in creating the music. Film: Thomas Reidelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides: working with time*, Burlington, VT: Docurama, 2004, DVD; Soundtrack: Fred Frith, *Rivers and Tides*, Winter & Winter 9100922, 2003, compact disc.

5 I have worked with Sally on every film she has made since *Orlando* in 1992. Long before that, in the late 1970s, she and I also performed together as improvising musicians (she’s a great singer).

spaces you can create, the silences you can create paradoxically through music” as she put it. Once, working with Peter on *The Top of His Head*,⁶ I had to improvise on guitar through a fairly long scene, and knowing his penchant for sparseness, I did so with the utmost restraint, carefully placing a few phrases at what I thought were the right moments. “That’s beautiful” he said, “but I need you to do a lot less”.

§§§

Richmond Station, 1958. Delicate, slow, cracking from slabs of dry ice on the railway platform, punctuated by the arrival and departure of steam trains in all their pomp, the hissing of pistons, eruptions of steam, roar of the furnace when the driver lifted me up into the cab and let me pull the whistle. On one occasion, driving the locomotive out of the station to reconnect at the other end of the train, the fireman dangled me by my legs out of the side of the cab. I can still hear my shrieks of nervous laughter mixed up with the rattle of points and the rhythmic acceleration of the engine as we picked up speed.

§§§

Zuckerfabrik, Dormagen, 2003. I first started playing barefoot as a member of Lars Hollmer’s Looping Home Orchestra⁷ in the early 1990s. Everyone else in the band played barefoot, so I did too. When I asked them why, there was no particular reason that I can remember. Later I also played barefoot for solo concerts. It was easier to move quickly

⁶ Starring Stephen Ouimette and Christie MacFadyen, *The Top of His Head* was Peter’s first fiction film and my first soundtrack experience. We were given six weeks in the National Film Board’s sound studio in Montreal, an unparalleled luxury which gave me a completely false impression of the “normal” conditions for recording film music, and allowed me to make numerous mistakes since there was plenty of time to fix them! Peter Mettler, *The Top of His Head* (Toronto: Rhombus Media and Grimthorpe Film, 1989, motion picture and 2007, DVD) and soundtrack by Fred Frith, *Top of His Head*, Made to Measure MTM21CD Crammed Discs, 1989, compact disc.

⁷ Lars Hollmer (1948–2008) was an extraordinary Swedish keyboardist and accordionist, founding member of Sammla Mamma’s Manna, The Accordion Tribe, Looping Home Orchestra, and other unique projects, and composer of some of my favorite music. He is sadly missed.

around my pedals, and I’d grown to like it. The truth hit me, however, when I first performed with percussionist Evelyn Glennie.⁸ Evelyn has been profoundly deaf since the start of her teenage years, but aided by a stubborn streak and a supportive teacher, she was able to continue her studies and become the renowned performer she is today. Evelyn explains that “hearing is a sensation for which you need your whole body,” that playing barefoot can also be an essential component of listening, listening not only with the ears but with every part of you, vibrations coming through the floor, through your fingertips, through your pores, sometimes continuing after your ears have stopped relaying information. I had some kind of intuitive understanding of this, I think most musicians do, but when I heard Evelyn explain it, and watched how her whole body acted like an antenna as she played, it made perfect sense. It’s as if she’s in a state of exquisite tension, her whole being acting as a “divining rod” for sound.

§§§

Elsässerstrasse, Basel, May, 2011. At the bus stop there is a mind-numbing level of noise from a construction crew using pavement-pounding equipment to flatten the road. The only thing anyone can think about is getting away from it as fast as possible. Suddenly the machine stops, and for a few seconds it’s as if we’ve achieved a new sonic hyper-awareness: clack of high heels, curiously emphasized fragments of several conversations at once, wires humming, a passing crow. *Un son peut en cacher un autre.*

§§§

⁸ I was invited to perform with Dame Evelyn Glennie during the filming of *Touch the Sound*, (NY: Docurama, 2006, DVD and soundtrack Evelyn Glennie and Fred Frith, *Touch the Sound*, Normal, 2007, compact disc) Thomas Riedelsheimer’s documentary film about her work, released in 2004. Our performances in the film actually constituted the first time we had ever played together, and culminated in the CD *The Sugar Factory*, released on the Tzadik label in 2007 (Tzadik 7623, 2007, compact disc).

A café in the village of Hérisson, France, 1992. Heike⁹ and our nine-month-old son Finn,¹⁰ who has not yet been diagnosed as hard of hearing, are sitting quietly with friends. Suddenly without warning Finn starts to cry, intense and urgent. Nothing seems to pacify him, so Heike takes him outside and he calms down immediately. Within seconds a violent altercation breaks out among some of the patrons at the bar, a fight that Finn had clearly “heard” coming, though none of the adults picked up on it.

§§§

Lower Tullochgrue farm, Scotland, 1959. In Scotland during the long summer holidays, I made friends with Johnny and learned to be quiet enough to creep up on deer—not to shoot them, just for the fun and the wonder. An engagement of all the senses—sound of wind and water, smell of swamp and cowpats, touch of trees and stones, getting close to deer without them seeing, hearing or scenting us. Everyday life as an adventure with endless variations, improvised without a guide, to see and hear for yourself: what’s next, what just happened, what will happen next? Once we found the wreckage of a plane scattered across the slopes of Ben Macdui. Another time we were charged by a bull, saved only by crawling through the mud under a barbed wire fence. I watched eleven-year old Johnny head for home one evening down the long farm lane after another breathless day, shouting at the top of his voice to anyone or anything that wanted to listen, just for the joy of being alive. “Come on gurrlls, here I am, I’m ready, come and see wha’ I’ve got!”

§§§

The Manor, Oxfordshire, 1973. Henry Cow are in residence at Virgin’s fancy recording studio, working on our first LP with engineer Tom

⁹ Heike Liss, whose work as a visual artist in multiple fields challenges and excites me on a daily basis.

¹⁰ Finn’s ingenious ways of living with his hearing loss have been a constant source of inspiration. He has never once, to my knowledge, accepted that something that he wishes to do is not possible for him, and is currently studying (and making) music and films.

Newman,¹¹ who has determined that as far as possible we should take charge ourselves. This was unusual at the time, and has probably as much to do with preserving his own sanity as with any desire on his part to empower the musicians! The task is to mix down the studio recording from sixteen tracks to two, the stereo master. He has given us a quick rundown as to how everything works and each of us is assigned a couple of faders. After a few run-throughs we attempt a mix; then we listen to what we’ve done, identifying the many changes required. During the next take we make enthusiastic comments as we go along: “That’s much better,” “This is the one,” and so on. Turning to Tom, we eagerly await his approval. “I hate to tell you this,” he says, “but you weren’t actually doing anything, just listening back to the same mix you did before!”

§§§

Mills College Faculty Village, 2002. I’m sitting in the garden reading a book on a sunny afternoon. I become dimly aware of the sound of some kind of motor coming from the direction of the main road. Turning my head I surprise a hummingbird hovering about an inch from my right ear.

§§§

La Monte Young rehearsing with the Ensemble Modern, Frankfurt, 1996. I’m taking a break from my own rehearsals, and am graciously allowed to observe. The musicians are arranged in a circle, with La Monte and Marian Zazeela in the middle, listening intently. There are four groups of four instruments, and the musicians have been instructed to play Bb. It is not going well. The composer stops the group and says: “If you can’t play the Bb, better to stop for a while and then rejoin.” They continue, apparently puzzled, struggling to find whatever precise Bb La Monte is looking for. Finally they hit a pure note, all together, and the whole room starts to vibrate, a ringing of the rafters, curved air, extraordinarily

¹¹ It was Tom who introduced me to the idea of the “studio as a compositional tool.” In his own music he was endlessly inventive, recording drum tracks by tapping a microphone with a pencil and simply changing the equalization, thus simulating the sound of the drum machine years before its invention!

beautiful. It continues for some time, but eventually they have to stop. “Good,” he says. “After lunch I suggest we try C.”

§§§

Montréal, 1988. In Scotland I had my first experience of a language I didn’t understand, and puzzled over the sound of it: new music, alive and enticing. I have always loved the sound of people speaking, and as I’ve learned new languages have come to realize that the best way for me to do it is to become the person I am in the new language, which involves not just words but body and attitude, and most of all a sense of the melody of the language you want to learn. This was brought home to me again when working with René Lussier¹² on his masterpiece, *Trésor de la Langue*, a series of powerful reflections on language and culture based on interviews recorded in the streets of Montréal and its environs, as well as free access to the archives of Radio Canada. The music is entirely focused on the sound of everyday speech, full of unexpected twists and turns, pauses, repetitions, exclamations—challenging to play and wonderful to listen to. It’s a great *hommage* to Québécois, revealing and revelling in the deep musicality of people talking. Since *Trésor* I’ve never been able to hear any language in quite the same way again.

§§§

Stuttgart, 1997. Three-and-a-half-year-old Luci¹³ is singing her favorite song from the movie *Michel und der Suppenschüssel*,¹⁴ behind the closed doors of her bedroom. Putting our ears to the door we hear a heartfelt

12 René Lussier, brilliant guitar player, highly original musical thinker, and one of Quebec’s most famous musical sons, has been a central figure in my creative life since the early 1980s. We have worked on many projects together over the years, of which *Trésor* is a notable example (*Le trésor de la langue*, Ambiances Magnétiques AM 015 CD, 1989, 3 compact discs).

13 Luci is my youngest daughter. Her love of movies has led to her aiming for a career as actor and director. Her knowledge of Swedish has yet to improve.

14 *Michel und der Suppenschüssel* (Hamburg: Oetinger, 2007, DVD) is one of a number of Swedish/German co-productions from the 1970s, based on books by beloved Swedish children’s author Astrid Lindgren. Pippi Longstocking is her most famous character, but there are many others, and these films are beautifully made and enduringly popular.

rendition of the Swedish of the original. It sounds curiously authentic without actually making any sense. “Fnü så plüd grå flö, snåte klü frå plö, klåv man-tel fråd fnödel rö ” and so on. Lasse Hollmer would have laughed his head off!

§§§

Tokyo, 1987. I’ve been invited by John Zorn to play rhythm guitar in a one-off concert with a blues band, the other members of which are all Japanese. It’ll be the first time I’ve played in a blues band since the 1960s, and I’m excited. We are playing some of the classics of Chicago blues, and the singer is a monster! His voice sounds like a cross between Willie Dixon and Muddy Waters and he sings every number with an authenticity and intensity that blows me away. Afterwards I walk up to him and tell him how much I loved his performance. He looks at me blankly. He doesn’t understand a word of English.

§§§

Oakland, 2000–2006. For a period of six years (under–8 to under–16) I coached my son’s team in the Jack London Youth Soccer League. Kids’ soccer begins with twenty enthusiastic bodies clumping around a ball like a swarm of bees and following it up and down the field. Bit by bit the players learn to get away, to create space for the ball to be passed to them. Football has a lot in common with musical improvisation. You constantly adjust to events that are not quite what you expected. The patterns may be familiar, but the movement is unpredictable, and you have to work in the dynamic and ever-changing area between what you would like to happen, what you think might happen, and what actually just happened. Where is the ball, where would I like it to be, where is everyone else, and what are they doing? What do I expect them to do next, and what are they expecting me to do? The more experience you have the more options you’ll be able to draw on, but you are also dependent on everyone else having the same degree of motivation, similar sets of skills, and the shared experience which has led you to avoid certain kinds of responses and embrace others. What’s critical is listening to the process, to the unpredictable interlocutor who’s keeping you in the

moment by removing the security of whatever plan you thought we were following.

§§§

Oakland and Esslingen, 1990–2011. After spending more working hours in the studio during the last forty years than practically anywhere else, I have a deep admiration for recording engineers. The ones I've been lucky enough to work with can hear the tiniest details of timing, tuning, acoustics, and everything else besides without losing track of what it is we're actually trying to do. Careful to the point of obsession in their attention to detail and desire for perfection, patient in the face of the contentious clang of changing minds, always flexible in their approach, they have been integral to my compositional process. We continue to learn from each other, and I raise my hat and a glass (or two) in their direction. Peter¹⁵ says: "Fred, if you want that to be in tune (or in time) you might want do it again!" Myles¹⁶ says (as I'm overdubbing a violin part): "Fred, I know the name of a very good violinist, would you like her number?" These are the kinds of people you want to work with!

§§§

On the way to a workshop with Mark Dresser, Porto, June, 2011. Our car is stopped at a traffic light outside the Casa de Musica. Clacks and cracks of kids jumping on and off skateboards. An impossibly wrinkled old lady at the window asks for money with dignity and resignation. Flag slapping at the pole in the wind, car engine stuttering, dogs baying in the distance. Swifts swoop and shriek, someone is singing on a balcony.

§§§

¹⁵ Peter Hardt, award-winning engineer and owner of the Jankowski Sound Fabrik in Esslingen, Germany. Our association began in 1994 when I was invited to record some music for Richard Linklater's film *Before Sunrise*. The music was never used, but we have had a cheerful and productive working relationship ever since!

¹⁶ Myles Boisen, of Guerrilla Recordings and the Headless Buddha Mastering Lab, in Oakland, California. I've been working with Myles for over thirty years, ever since I asked him to cut up and reassemble pieces of tape for several days during a recording project commissioned by RAI (Italian national radio) in Rome in 1980.

Sussex, 1957. Springtime on the Downs, lying on the grass and listening to endless loops of skylarks. These small birds ascend almost vertically, with strenuous effort, until they're only tiny specks in the sky. There they hover awhile, singing their hearts out, before parachuting down to earth again in mesmerizing, slow circles.

§§§

Cambridge, 1970. My friend DJ Perry¹⁷ has a job teaching English to foreign students in a language lab. The students are all seated in small soundproof cubicles, and, using headphones, the teacher can work with each of them in turn as they continue to practice their assigned words and phrases. One day David invites me to go in to work with him; he wants to show me something. I put on the master headphones, he presses a switch, and suddenly I can hear every one of the fifty students at once, a glorious cacophony as accents from what seems like every region in the world wrestle with the same short phrases, sometimes barely comprehensible, all out of sync, completely surreal—some of the greatest music I have ever heard.

§§§

Libya, 1940. My father¹⁸ is reconnoitering in the Western Desert. He's left his unit behind him while checking out the terrain ahead for enemy activity. Turning, he finds himself entirely alone in a vastness of nothing, 360 degrees of identical terrain with not the smallest sound to help him. Without his compass to show him where he had come from, he might be there still. I have always been haunted by this story, which I

¹⁷ David "DJ" Perry was a fellow student of mine at Cambridge who collaborated on a number of projects in the early days of Henry Cow. As an employee of the BBC, his access to the renowned BBC Archives provided an endlessly fascinating source of material that found its way in various guises into numerous pieces.

¹⁸ My father was a gifted pianist, and one of my earliest memories is of sitting under the Bechstein he had bought for a song in the 1950s and happily bathing in the sound. Captain Donald Frith's job at the time of this incident was leading convoys carrying petrol to troops on the front line near Tobruk. After the long trip across the desert most of it had evaporated, leaving barely enough to make the trip back to get more!

heard many times over the years. I try to imagine the strange, blank, suddenly silent space and my twenty-one-year-old father, completely alone, standing in it.

§§§

St Etienne, France, April, 2011. A concert at the Festival des Musiques Innovatrices. The venue is in a complex of buildings surrounding an old coalmine, now a museum; guitarist Paulo Angeli¹⁹ and I are to perform in a room called *La Salle des Pendues* (literally, “the chamber of the hanged”). A transfixing sight awaits us—above our heads (and those of the audience) are suspended the working clothes of miners, left as they were when the mine closed in 1973. To save space, the men would attach the clothes to numbered chains, along with helmets, clapper boards and mirrors, and hoist them high above to be reclaimed when they came back to work the next morning. The effect is eerie, having the air of an atrocity, silent “figures” swinging gently above us, as if the aftermath of a bizarre ritual slaughter. But “listening” to the room reassures us that far from being sinister, this was a place of solidarity and bonhomie, of a shared awareness of danger, of bonding between men whose families had sent their sons to work the mine for generations. The disjunction between what the image first suggests and what it actually represents was resolved for me through the act of listening, almost an invocation.

§§§

Kirchberg, Switzerland. Etienne Conod,²⁰ the wonderfully imaginative and creative engineer of Sunrise Studios in the 1970s and 80s once told

¹⁹ Sardinian musician and historian Paolo Angeli, inventor of a unique guitar that is played with both hands and feet, defying logical explanations as to how what he is doing could be possible!

²⁰ Etienne Conod has had one of the most colorful careers of anyone I know. After obligatory military service, he has (so far) worked as a photo-journalist, sold wickerware, played keyboards in a rock band, founded and directed one of the most successful recording studios in Switzerland, and emigrated to the Australian Alps where he more or less singlehandedly ran a bed-and-breakfast and a pretty big farm. Eventually he returned to Zurich, where he studied psychology and social pedagogy. He now works for a charitable trust with particular focus on drugs and poverty (when he's not playing the Hammond organ).

me about a colleague of his who could recognize the details of a studio's architecture and construction by listening to a recording. “Wish they hadn't left that left skylight open,” he would grumble.

§§§

Big Sur, 1991. Sleeping in a cabin high up in the mountains, I'm woken up by a mysterious sound—something large is very close by, and moving rapidly. It's pitch dark. A bear, I'm thinking, and sit bolt upright. I'm having a moment of slight panic. There's no bear, but what else could it be? Heike must be shaking the blanket outside to get rid of some horrendous beastie. I'd better get up and go find out. Then I notice that she is actually sitting next to me, shaking Finn's baby bottle...

§§§

Reach, Cambridgeshire, 1970. Fishing in a remote spot below the high bank of the Lode, watching the float drifting. After a while I'm invisible to the life of the place, motionless and spellbound. Slowly I become alive to details, to the gentle ripple caused by hints of a breeze on the water's surface, or the shiver as it passes through willows and sycamores, an interference of finches or starlings, a cow anxious to be milked in the next door field, a tractor sputtering, the dull continuo of traffic on the main road five miles away, an occasional chuckle of duck or coot or moorhen. Punctuations of rain, sudden flash of a kingfisher, the eloquence of warblers; suddenly, dry crackles become a roar of burning stubble in the field behind me; I have to walk home in the water.

§§§

Brèves, France, 1977. My band-mates and I are eating dinner after the concert. I have become hypnotized by the sound, heard through the window, of a nightingale singing. I leave the others and go outside to sit on the wall with my *cahier de musique*. I want to try and write down what I hear. I can barely manage half a phrase out of every six phrases or so, and even that is only the simplest of approximations. Eventually I give up and just listen, rooted to the spot for what seems like hours.

Years later I happened to see a film of Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod walking through the woods together, he with his notebook, she

FRED FRITH

with a portable tape recorder. He listens intently to a bird singing and scribbles rapidly. Then she plays back the recording as he checks his notes. "Oui, c'est ça." He nods, and they continue their walk. I am speechless with admiration!

§§§

In the mountains near Stans, Switzerland, April, 2004. Rehearsals with Arte Quartett for *Still Urban*²¹ are beginning today in the convent at Niederrickenbach, most easily accessible by cable car. No traffic, complete peace, nuns going about their business and leaving us to ours. As we walk towards our rehearsal space, a gymnasium, I notice a young sister at the end of a corridor, talking animatedly on a mobile phone. "Lass von dir hören!" she says.²²

§§§

S-Bahn from Stuttgart to Rutesheim, July 2011. The train pulls into the station, the long tones of the electric motor making a slow glissando downwards, with a diminuendo that reveals a continuous, quiet, sixty-cycle hum. Hiss of compressed air, sliding doors, snatch of a different acoustic space from the platform outside, open and inviting, another hiss, slide and loud bang of the doors closing. A glissando upwards eclipses the hum in an even crescendo. The driver has forgotten to switch off the microphone, and starts to whistle in a cheerfully off-hand kind of way, accompanied by the whooshes and drones and clicks. This continues until the next station. The feeling in our carriage has changed. We are all listening attentively, and everyone is smiling.

21 *Still Urban* was commissioned by the Stanser Musiktage in Switzerland. It's a long composition for saxophone quartet and electric guitar that also incorporates recordings of West Oakland, and is a kind of meditation on urban life. (Fred Frith and the Arte Quartett, *Still Urban*, Intakt Records CD 155, 2009, compact disc.)

22 This would probably best translate as "stay in touch," but literally means "let me hear from you."