

“Running with it”: Dave Clark of The Woodchopper’s Association

Video and interview conducted by Steve Sladkowski

Transcribed by Rob Jackson

Edited by Paul Watkins

[Music Playing]

DC: Pleasant people will make good music based on the fact that they are ready to tune in and just get their radio tuned into the frequency of happiness as it were. Or mirth, or madness! I’m always confident that some great music will happen. It’s really the company of the people. It’s community.

The Origins of The Woodchopper’s Association

Lew Melville and I had gone to the next wave series to watch the Sun Ra movie *Space is the Place*, and when we came out of that movie we were going to get a road dog and I said to Lew, “I want to make music where people get to improvise. Nobody calls me to do that.” And he said, “Why don’t you start one yourself?” And so I started it, you know? I just thought well I’m gonna start something up. So Lew was there and then a couple of other people joined in and the next thing we knew we had something friendly going. I think the first gig was Andrew Henry on drums from Guh, Lew Melville on guitar, Andrew Whiteman, the Apostle of Hustle on... maybe on bass, Chris Brown from the Bourbon Tabernacle Choir, Kissin’ Kay Fenner on trombone, Scott Cameron, the scotch cammer, from 100 Pound Head and Party Finger on saxophone, viola and various other things, Kevin Hearn on keyboards who played with Look People, who plays with The Barenaked Ladies... and Tim Meck on guitar, Tech to the Stars and also of his own Tim Meck’s peepshow. And Carole Swandek, who has a different name now but was Carole Swandek then.

It was like a bomb waiting to explode. The more we played the more people wanted to be involved because they, the world is populated similarly by people who want to enjoy themselves and be creative. We started off right away with shows at a place called X-Rays and we played all the major clubs in town. Ducktailing on the days when I was playing with the Rheostatics (pop band) and so I had a lot of connections. We were playing at the Horseshoe, the Rively, the Cameron, you name it. And sometimes we don’t play to a huge audience and sometimes we play to a packed house but it’s all about ‘the doin.’ I’m as happy to play to one as one hundred thousand. I’ve done both. It’s like... it’s all music.

Members of The Woodchopper’s Association

Once you’re a Woodchopper you’re in the band forever. But whose in... you know we play with Scott Thomson who plays in The Rent. We play with Blake Howard [Hey Blake what bands do you play in?] Guh! Rock Plaza Central. Nick Taylor who plays with the Old Soul. Lewis Melville from you know his own projects and Tannis Sliman. Paul

Newman from the Paul Newman experience. Karen Ing who plays with Do Make Say Think. Brody West who plays with the X and Getachoo, he plays with the people from the Instant Composers Pool. Andrew Whiteman plays with Broken Social Scene. Jah Youssouf, who is, you know, the voice of the street in Mali. Ibert Imales Chung who is a bhata master and canter of sorts in Cuba. Gord Downey, Peaches, Chilly Gonzales, you know Jason Beck, Drew Dreikka played with us (Drew is from Degrassi Street)... [laughs]... but I will say this: I don't really care how big or how small people are or where they've gone to, and I will look directly at the camera because I truly mean this, the most important person, in the words of Alvin Jones (and I've co-opted this) is the next person. And I find joy in playing with everybody that we play with. I can't really even say that there is anyone who hasn't been in some way inspiring, or at least disturbing enough, to make it worthwhile to hangout with. The Woodchoppers is really an extension of a large wave of the world which seeks positivity, and that doesn't mean that it has to be flowers and fairies dancing around, but it just means being creative in a place where everyone can be themselves. And I don't care if it is two people playing in the band or fifty people. Something great is going to happen. Always. Always.

Influences on The Woodchopper's Association

Sly and the Family Stone! Duke Ellington. Dr. John. Led Zeppelin. Professor Longhair, The Meters, Alice Cooper, John Coltrane... I mean the list goes on! The Sex Pistols, The Diodes, The Buzzcocks, The Vibrators, The Dead Kennedys. You know, just scads of people, the Beastie Boys, you name it. Max Webster, they were a huge influence on me. A local Toronto band.

Woodchopper's Association Performances

I never know what we are going to do but I know we are going to do something good. And it is nice to see the direction people take it in. I like to always bring in new people every time we play. Tonight our guest is Glenda DelMonte and she is a pianist who immigrated from Cuba just about a decade ago and we are... you know... she is pulling in a vibe that is colouring the music in a beautiful way. Everybody in this band is a leader so it is easy to find a place to go.

[Musical interlude]

Often time we will go to workshop and teach these kinds of things and then just get people up and leading the bands. It is a nice way to empower the folks inside of a band to work on the instant composition in a very pleasant way. But with the band it is very intuitive. It is kind of like watching a dancer and following a dancer and the reason it started out was to get people to listen a little clearer and then it was, there was, I just thought some of the stuff could help shift into a different gear and turn corners and dovetail or highlight people.

[Music]

Okay, we are going to just dim the light on that one and shine it on somebody else or some other crew and then bringing it back in and dovetailing it and eventually people become acquainted with how to listen clearer and then you know in general I don't have to do that stuff much and when I do it is fun and giggles; kind of like playing the drums. I can do it from the drums, I can do it standing up and sometimes people you know they intuit a different kind of thing from it and that is totally cool.

[Music]

There are some sort of idiomatic cues that can be used to make it easier for people to be inside music and when they are not there they either have to start running with it or turning the other way and of course the people that we've got to work with they start running with it and when you're kind of on their turf you better have your runners on too because they are gonna take you for a ride and it's great! It's awesome. It is so exciting to be challenged and part of a conversation that is just bouncing from all kinds of poles and different shades and depths and it just seems like a great way to be able to spend time in life.

[Music]