

Interviews



Tod Dockstader's studio, circa. 1966



Tod Dockstader and James Reichert in the studio mixing Omniphony



Tod Dockstader's studio, circa. 1961

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Interview with David Lee Myers [2004]

This interview was originally published as the notes to the ReR CD release of Pond.

David Lee Myers We corresponded off and on for a number of years through letters, but when you got yourself a computer, that escalated our communication a lot. I remember that after a while you decided to try some music programs on the computer, but you felt confounded by it all at the time. I like to think that it was my encouragement that kept you at it until it slowly seemed to become viable for you.

Tod Dockstader "Slowly" is the word alright. The only thing about it that was familiar to me was: I was looking at waveforms again for the first time in about fifty years, back when I edited optical film sound. And without your belief I could do it, with a mouse, it wouldn't have happened.

DLM Somewhere along the way we discovered that we both shared a fascination with frog sounds, and I had the brainy idea that we might actually make some music together along those lines. Most of my work has been 100% electronic, but I've always itched to work with some "real world" sounds, and this seemed to me ideal. The frog and toad noises are quite "abstract" and expressive, and really lend themselves to manipulation, I think...

TD They are, and they did - more and more as we came to understand their songs. I was used to real-world sounds as a material for music, but, other than a few cats, I don't remember using any living sources. Living next to a small swamp, as I did, I heard them, and thought about it - but...

DLM I recorded a lot of the frogs and toads with a portable recorder, sneaking around in bushes and lakes at night. I believe you had an experience with such activity which actually got you in trouble with the law... ?

TD Not deep trouble. I'd go out at night with a Nagra I had use of, and hunker down in bushes in people's yards, trying for tiny bug songs - but someone saw me hiding there and called the cops. I explained what I was doing to them and showed lots of ID and they told me to quit doing it and let me go.

DLM Also on Pond are a few insect-type sounds which I think you told me were actually derived from synthesizers?

TD They weren't from a synth. I'd re-wired a couple of cheap test-tone generators so that they produced a variety of variable bird-calls, peeper-peeps, and unidentified insect susurrations. This was for a piece I was thinking of doing, involving insects and the end of the world, but somehow never got around to.

DLM Our cover art is based on a photograph you took long ago. It has a kind of murky, mysterious darkness about it. You can imagine these strange creatures hiding in this thicket and having the most secret and bizarre conversations...

TD Well, they're not secret anymore. And the photograph was of one, gnarled tree, taken at sundown. I made two exposures, flipped one over the other, as slides, and saw a kind of face emerge. And, after we'd gotten a ways into "Pond," I remembered it - it seemed to go with the music.

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Many thanks to NOMEX for directing me towards Dockstader's music and to Howard Slater for his support, encouragement and contribution. This site has been constructed to disseminate information about Tod Dockstader - if you have any contributions, please email them to the [webmaster](#).