

Czech-Canadian by birth and North Carolinian by upbringing, **Wendy Spitzer** is a composer/multi-instrumentalist who writes and performs under the moniker Felix Obelix (<http://felixobelix.com>). She has released two albums and toured extensively in the US, in addition to teaching, commissions, and theatre/film work. Her projects have been funded by the Durham (NC) Arts Council, the Orange County Arts Commission, the Crosshatch Center for Art & Ecology, and the Strowd Roses Foundation, among others.

Genevieve Dawson is a performer and composer originally from Edinburgh and now studying Creative Practice at Goldsmiths. Her previous work has focused on vocal improvisation, music for theatre and alt-folk songwriting. She performs under her own name regularly across London. You can find her music at: [facebook.com/genevivedawsonmusic](https://www.facebook.com/genevivedawsonmusic)

Nour Emam (artist name: Nur) is an Egyptian producer, singer and sound artist currently based in London, where she is studying for her Master's degree in Sonic Arts at Goldsmiths. Nour's sound is heavily influenced by Musique Concrète and Electroacoustic music, as well as her deep and personal interest in religious, specifically Islamic, ethnomusicological research and compositions. She is currently exploring experimental dance music, as well as multi-channel micro sound pieces.

Barnabas Poffley is a percussionist and producer based in London. His current interests include Afro-Cuban percussion, which he plans to study further in Central America at the end of the year.

Rick Leigh is a trumpeter, singer, composer, and choral director from Preston, UK pursuing a Master's of Music in Popular Music. His final project will be a performance at the Albany on the 15th of September, 2016.

Tim Gardner is a Popular Music undergraduate from Birmingham. He is involved in various projects as a multi-instrumentalist, arranger, composer, and director.

Thanks to:

Goldsmiths Music Department, GMS & EMS & Media Resources Centre staff, Sherry Ostapovitch, Lisa Busby, John Drever, Patricia Alessandrini, Naomi Jackson, Idan Brutman.

Dedicated, in memoriam, Wes Phillips (1977-2016)



Vulnerability in Collaboration

Wendy Spitzer, aka Felix Obelix
MMus in Creative Practice
Final Degree Performance

8 September, 2016, 8:00 p.m.
Richard Hoggart Building, Recital Room 167
Goldsmiths, University of London

The Project

In the basic emotional exchange of vulnerability, one party chooses to risk potential judgment by opening up to another, and when the other party rewards that risk by responding positively, this leads to human connection¹. Vulnerability is also thought to be the prerequisite psychological state necessary for the development of trust². As trust is a highly dynamic process, the agents in the relationship continually manage risk, reward, and control, and in the case of identity-based trust, can even experience a merging of identity with the other. Yet at the core of both trust and human connection is the willingness to make the affective leap of faith to show oneself fully to another.

I posit that this same phenomenon can play out between people in creative collaborations. Each creative act made in front of another person represents this same exchange: by showing oneself to another during the process of creation, imperfections and all, a bond can be forged. Creative collaborations likewise involve notions of risk and trust.

But how does this emotional exchange actually transpire in collaboration? How do both parties in the exchange negotiate issues of control, trust, vulnerability, risk, and reward during the act of creation? What specific insight into the phenomenon can be gained through arts-based collaborative research – where the researcher is also co-creator of the work?

I sought to answer these questions by undertaking three separate collaborative musical projects during the summer of 2016 with fellow MMus students at Goldsmiths, University of London. In addition to co-composing, I interviewed the participants and recorded our creative sessions to document the trajectory of our interactions. The performance tonight showcases the works we produced, and will be followed by a brief Q&A.

¹ Brown, Brené. 2013. *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead*. London: Portfolio Penguin.

² Rousseau, D. M., S.B. Sitkin, R. S. Burt, and C. Camerer. 1998. "Not so different afterall: a cross-discipline view of trust." *Academy of Management Review* 23 (3): 393-404.

Barnabas/Wendy collaboration

The Barnabas/Wendy collaboration focused on rhythm and meter manipulation in instrumental music. We purposely approached the collaboration with little pre-planning to inject spontaneity into the interaction, which necessitated perhaps the greatest negotiation and flexibility of all collaborations. The only aspects decided prior to the collaborative week were that the music be instrumental, that risk-taking would be encouraged, and that both parties be fully invested in all parts produced.

Wendy provided the initial stimuli for both pieces – short melodic motifs that were then expanded on and arranged by both Wendy and Barnabas in one-on-one rehearsals held 8-16 August, 2016. A workflow emerged such that live improvisation/jamming on instruments was used to solidify parts, and then those were translated into MIDI in Logic audio software for refinement and arrangement. After the second day of collaboration, we decided that the pieces would best be presented in live performance, necessitating additional players. In brainstorming about possible performers, we considered instrumentation, temperament, ability, and availability; Rick Leigh (who has collaborated before with both Barnabas and Wendy) and Tim Gardner (who has played before with Barnabas in a more limited capacity) were brought on to fill out the ensemble.

With the Barnabas/Wendy arrangements and players in hand, Wendy created sheet music in Sibelius software from the Logic MIDI file. The sheet music was then distributed to the players as a guide; in full rehearsals, the parts were adjusted in collaboration with all four players.

Nour/Wendy collaboration

The Nour/Wendy collaboration used five photographs representing different facets of vulnerability as source material for a five-day improvisational intensive. In two preparatory meetings, we together decided on which photographs to use, how they would inform the emotional and sonic content of each improvisation, as well the parameters of the weeklong project. The project was guided by the extreme difference in collaborator skillsets (Nour as electronic sonic artist and Wendy as more traditional composer and instrumentalist).

Each photograph's histogram (the pictorial representation of darks, mid-tones, and lights in a photograph) became the starting point for the frequency content and structure of the improvisation. The darks represented low tones, mid-tones represented mid-range frequencies, and lights indicated high frequencies. The histogram would be read from left to right as a graphic score – one that we could both follow in real-time – with peaks representing periods of intensity, and troughs indicating sparser, quieter interludes. We also ordered the photographs from least personal (a found photograph of strangers on day 1) to the most personal (portraits of ourselves on days 4 and 5 – versions of which are showcased in tonight's performance).

In individual advance preparation, Nour ran the photographs through a Max/MSP patch that translates the contrast information of the photograph into sound; she used this patch and chose other sounds that each photograph evoked for her. Wendy selected a different instrument for each photograph/improvisation, based on frequency content and emotional/thematic content of the photograph. To keep each day's improvisation fresh and immediate, neither collaborator told the other in advance of the day of improvising, which instrument/sounds she had decided upon.

The five consecutive days of improvising were held 11-15 July, 2016. Each day consisted of four ~10-minute-long cycles of each photograph/improvisation. For research purposes into the collaboration, each day began and ended with video-recorded pre- and post-interviews.

Program

Genevieve Dawson + Wendy Spitzer

Music and lyrics co-composed by Genevieve and Wendy

Night Letter

I Am Not the Person that You Think I Am

The Ghost and the Coat

Nour Emam + Wendy Spitzer

Improvisations by Nour and Wendy, based on photographs

Improvisation #4

Nour – electronics / Wendy – cor anglais

Improvisation #5

Nour – electronics / Wendy – marimba

Barnabas Poffley + Wendy Spitzer

Music co-composed by Barnabas and Wendy

Penny Miles

Answering Your Message on the 13th of August

Barnabas Poffley – drums

Wendy Spitzer – bass, organ

Rick Leigh – flugelhorn, trumpet

Tim Gardner – organ, violin

~ Q&A to follow ~

Genevieve/Wendy collaboration

The Genevieve/Wendy collaboration was an exploration in songwriting in partnership. With very different approaches to song- and lyric-writing, and never having written songs in close collaboration before, we set out to investigate what output would be produced within this mode of creative work. A mutual respect for each other's songwriting capabilities and a shared belief in the importance of lyric writing and revision set the stage for the collaborative endeavour.

After the initial interview on the topic of vulnerability, we conceived of an epistolary methodology to further explore the theme. With Genevieve out of the country for the fortnight preceding the collaboration, we exchanged long emails about events in our lives, especially commenting on interpersonally vulnerable moments and situations. This step solidified pre-collaboration rapport, was itself an act of self-exposure and trust, and became the starting point for some of the lyrical content to be developed later.

Most musical material and all lyrics were created together during the week of 1-6 August, 2016, with refinements made in the weeks thereafter. Melodic and chordal content was created in rehearsals, with each performer writing her own parts, often improvising in looped 'jamming' sessions on riffs created by either party. Wendy or Genevieve wrote the lyrics individually during the evenings of that same week, set to the vocal melodies created by Genevieve during the collaborative rehearsals. Lyrics were brought into sessions the following day and were reviewed and revised extensively by the collaborative partner.

The Ghost and the Coat

Feel the light fade
Twinkling traffic
Won't go outside
Can't bear the noise
Watch the milk is boiling over
Hear the train pass
The neck twist tighter

Look the hourglass stops
Undo the necklace in knots

Open up your beak and eat the
egg I give you
Good, now
Let me in too
Familiar and cool

Lie back on the bed don't move
your lips anymore
Stop
Someone's at the door

I am a ghost
I am a crumpled up note
You found under your bed
The shame between your legs

I am a coat
You put on when you're alone
Moth-eaten round your name
Why do you stay the same?

Wash the sand off
Empty the bath out
Won't unlock it
Can't feel the cold

The roof the room the earth
goes under
Hear the nightjar
The breath comes faster

Feel the heaviness come
The bones that warmed you
so long

Those caresses every morning
waking you up
So no need for a clock

Reenact it, when it's quiet,
circle the room
There's no one to stop you

I am a ghost
A place that you used to know
The first time you undressed
Remember what was said

I am a coat
You put on when you're alone
ill-fitting it became
Why can't you stay the same?

open up the note
the doors to rooms
that you had closed

You aren't as alone as you
feel

I Am Not the Person that You Think I Am

The view below, of boats, of foam, of sea to dip into
They gazed from the estate, through glass doors they withdrew
I opened up the blinds
My hope lay drawn in lines

The apricot jam left out in the sun too long and now
Fetid and foul, I smear the sourdough anyhow
I open up the map
My hope a handicap

I am not the person that you think I am
So I lie below and wait for reckoning (because I am an)
Acrobat swinging without a mat
Diplomatically I bell the cat
I am not the person that you think I am

I was quite nervous did you notice how nervous I was?
To speak to servants well you know that's not what's done
I opened up to you
My hope lay by the pool

I am not the person that you think I am
How the silence in the house is frightening (ever since I was)
Just a kid, I sensed our quiet sick
Lonely house, I sat transfixed in it
All risk and no reward, pouring chlorine in the harpsichord

Night Letter

Well then
I woke up and
The moon was shining
As bright as the sun
How strange
That the setting of one
Could be confused for
The rising of the other

Well then
At five a.m.
Replaying our tape
Debating our loop
How strange
The auctioneer in my brain
Could sabotage me
He's supposed to be a friend of
Mine

I lie flat lined
Heart murmurs, this is not right
A roar in quietude
My eyeballs have become
Unglued

I dreamt that you were still in
My bedroom
You held me close
My head fit in the space
Beneath your chin
A thrill as old as the hills

Well then
I'll make the most
Of the hour, make toast
Scour the counter down
How strange
The maladies they can take
Years to break through
Hoops of paper realigning us

A letter I write:
"No deep sleep in a fortnight
A famine, send rations
I panic for your compassion

I palpate my lesion
I need your anaesthesia
Give love to her highness
For me. Yours truly, a mess."

I know that our twin beds will
Converge
Anew and then
My head will fit in the space
Beneath your chin
We'll be our old selves again
Again
Again