

ANDREW: You mentioned he is a composer and conductor.  
MISHA: Yes, and a very open person. Sometimes he would say to me, 'I have to write all this down', (when I was playing) and 'Please, wait a few hours, because I have to think of other things.' I could feel that that statement was too much for him to make; he should have simply asked for *silence*. His argument was 'you must stop playing in order that I may write it all down,' for you see he had penchant for making notations of everything he heard. I have the same thing in a way. I try to imagine how you should notate noises and music...

ANDREW: So you're still guided by that internal graphic reference.

MISHA: For me, improvisation is not a holy cow but a method of expression. Some subjects are suited to that method and others, much better treated via other methods, so composition or semi-composition or remembering things or improvising--it's all one field of being busy with music.

ANDREW: You mentioned earlier that you were writing an opera.

MISHA: Oh yes, that's right, but it's a funny kind of opera. It's for trained voices--the classical way, the opera way--the *funny* way...

ANDREW: ha...ha...ha...ha...

MISHA: --and improvisers. The opera singers are also supposed to improvise--not all the way, I'll give them a little help. It's important that they find their own ways, I think. The subject of the opera is a kind of third rate metaphysics. It's about werewolves and vampires so I let the ghouls sing like opera singers. There are also those who cannot sing at all, yet who sing in my opera so I foresee some fruitful clashes.

ANDREW: How large a performing ensemble will there be?

MISHA: Maybe seven or eight improvisers, among them various guests appearing one night only during the run. Also guest actors who will be eaten by the werewolves and bitten by the vampires; scared to death by other terrible metaphysics.

ANDREW: Is this the latest in your line of yearly stage projects?

MISHA: That's right. I'm busy writing the texts. We got some money from the government to make theatre, being improvising musicians, but the money is not really enough to rehearse like you should, let's say, for a television appearance. There you should rehearse with the actors and all the effects and the complete scenery for at least two or three months to create something that has the flux of drama, the flow of one situation to another, etc. etc. This is all not possible because we have only the funds to rehearse a very short time, maybe two days, and then have the performances. Then there is an extra difficulty. I don't like the idea of every performance being the same. That would even include even more rehearsal and more difficulties, so let's say I would need four or five months to deal with all those problems but I cannot afford that. One day I write a scene for two vampires and one werewolf and the next day I would write another scene in place of that for one vampire and raincloud and somebody who's cleaning grocery stores--well, whatever seems to be needed. Actors cannot learn those texts by heart from one day to the next so they read them from the script on stage. What really happens is that I give a rough idea of how the scene could be when properly rehearsed plus the fact that improvisers are very much used to that kind of set-up always. The only people who can react properly to the whole condition are the improvisers.

ANDREW: That sounds like a bizarre combination of elements that could be really successful. I'm intrigued by the idea.

MISHA: I think so. What I hope for it that some day the city of Amsterdam would give the opportunity to do it the way it should be treated. Then it would become *clearer* to most people who are not thinking in terms of speculations when they see the theatre. You shouldn't underestimate people though, the public is not a kind of stupid melange of individuals; partly they are very intelligent and know more than the players. That is also possible.

ANDREW: You already mentioned that you have improvised practically all your life and that when you were still enrolled at the Conservatory you had recorded with Dolfy, so you must have begun your involvement with the jazz tradition early on.

MISHA: I wanted to irritate my parents a little bit by trying to play boogie-woogie.

ANDREW: Was that considered naughty?

MISHA: Yes, it was considered a little bit...out of the question. They were very much involved in classical music of course, but also in contemporary music and that's what I knew from a very early age. I had the privilege to know Webern, Stravinsky, Berg, whomever, before the age of ten. It was during the war '40-'45; we were rather secluded--there were no concerts anymore. It came as a surprise that other kids didn't have the

same information as I had...and the surprise is still there, that it's not common. During the war we had one Ellington record that I turned over and over, I was really intrigued by it. It was completely different from all the other music anyway. Jazz music had a very big influence on me, though there was almost none to be found. Then right after the war there was suddenly plenty. There were the transmissions for the American forces in Europe and in the later '40s records came in force. As I told you, I was always improvising (on piano as I never played other instruments). I started to play jazz.

ANDREW: Just from listening to the radio?

MISHA: That's right, and trying to play boogie-woogie. My parents disliked that a little bit. Not very much though, they adapted to that later and were interested in my work. They were always very open, much too open

## I took Misha to a pocket calculator

store where he made the acquaintance of a talking computerized chess board which I had punched in to an easy level of play. The computer indicated its moves almost instantly and at first, after several seconds of waiting for Misha's reply, it would say 'Your move!' Within a few volleys Misha had a sense of the computer's game plan and was then able to match its pace. An interchange ensued which was less than lightning fast only because of my incompetence at punching in the moves, which led to my erasing the computer's memory when I attempted to indicate a castling. Misha continued the game hypothetically, maintaining the pace while speculating on his deceased opponent's potential moves. I left them as a new game was begun, this time at the computer's most difficult level--the store management seemed happy to have such a match take place on their premises, Misha was performing. Five hours later he arrived at the Music Gallery. The game had been long, mostly because the formerly impatient computer had needed fifteen minutes to formulate each of its moves. Misha won, and said of the computer: he is good but he is not *very* good. But he is very slow.

--J.O.

maybe. I couldn't irritate them anymore, this was yet one more irritation, of course.

ANDREW: Hmhm.

MISHA: But then happily there were other things to get angry over. This motor of music, which I think is very important; being angry, being irritated...*somehow being* annoyed by things...that's in a way my main source of being busy.

ANDREW: What are you angry about these days?

MISHA: Oh...countless.

ANDREW: Then you must be pretty busy.

MISHA: No, not necessarily. I'm also kind of lazy, of course. Always being busy implies that you really believe that you can devise solutions to any problem. That's not how it goes.

ANDREW: You don't believe that every problem has a solution, then?

MISHA: Oh no, certainly not, but it's certainly a kind of motor. The energy comes from that.

ANDREW: When did you begin to play with musicians of like interests?

MISHA: Very late. Well, I'm 45 years old now and my Dolfy record was made in '63, so I was 28, and that's not so particularly early. I have been playing since 55/56 with other musicians.

ANDREW: These were local musicians?

MISHA: Yes, of course, we were playing jazz. In a way the improvisation opened up for me after I left the Conservatory since there was simply nobody I could play with. I was listening to Cecil Taylor records when I realized that I had been writing pieces like Cecil Taylor sounded in the fifties. Cluster pieces. I couldn't do anything with them in improvisation. People didn't recognize it as jazz, for instance. They thought 'He's crazy, he's out of his mind.'

ANDREW: You or Cecil Taylor?

MISHA: Both of us. For me Cecil Taylor's music was already common, it was nothing special, in a way. About '64 or '65 there were people from similar backgrounds and various disciplines like Han Bennink who came onto the scene. He was a pupil of the art school He learned painting and calligraphy. There was also Willem Breuker coming up--they were a new generation and they were open to play music that diverged from the jazz tradition. At that time Han Bennink and I were backing touring American players at local clubs. As far as influences are