



Evil Moisture film for *Plague Time Television* episode four (2020)

A woman wearing a plague doctor's mask surveys her back garden, her focus finally resting on a rubber chicken lodged in a tree. A man in a gas mask plays an accordion outside. Two women blow harmonicas together in a woodland glade. A group of people in a park improvise a composition on double bass and egg slicer. A man in a Jacques Tati T-shirt sings wordlessly into his camera. Just a sample of the near 150 contributions to the five episodes of *Plague Time Television* – an online public service television styled project temporarily set up by Brighton based sound and visual artists Dylan Nyoukis and Karen Constance, as a way of replacing their annual Colour Out Of Space festival during the current pandemic.

The idea caught on as the improvised music circuit was forced to shut down and find alternative methods to survive. There have been numerous experimental music channels this year presenting recordings and films from contributors that were streamed free, often on YouTube – notable examples include UK improvising guitarist John Russell's expertly curated *Mopomoso TV*, and the TUSK Virtual festival, the latter featuring contributions from Gastr Del Sol founding member David Grubbs, New Zealand's The Dead C, a visitation from The Sun Ra Arkestra and Malcy Duff's *Dental Practice*, a surrealistic animation series (with shades of cartoonist Jim Woodring) that makes for compelling viewing.

For *Plague Time Television* Karen Constance's intoxicating and deliriously disturbing animated cue cards introduce each artist/musician from its plethora of acts. Ripped from her portfolio of collages, drawings and film footage, the viewer is eye-blasted with a hallucinogenic mix of early 1960s UK kitsch distortions, Harry Smith styled art cinema and suggested mutations of pop art pioneer Eduardo Paolozzi's *Moonstrips Empire News* prints. "I was just using my iPad to mess about with some of my own artwork," she says when asked about her working technique. "I am a fan of both Harry Smith and Paolozzi, but other influences that spring to mind for

film and animation are sound artist Henry Jacobs and the late Jeff Keen from Brighton. That's life affirming wild shit."

"We both would climb on that Paolozzi foot sculpture [*The Manuscript Of Monte Cassino*] at the top of Leith Walk, Edinburgh as kids," adds Nyoukis reflectively. "There is a 'recreation' of his studio in Edinburgh's Modern Art Gallery, which I remember really digging on in my early twenties – but Jeff Keen is off the hook, so ahead of his time."

I ask about *PTTV*'s decision-making methods, and what kind of brief they sent out to their invited list of musicians and artists. "The basic gist was along the lines of, keep it like ten minutes or under and preferably don't do a live/jam thing," reveals Nyoukis. "Early American cable TV might also have been mentioned as a guideline, not that I think we came anywhere near the glory of that rot."

"We didn't want anything that was too serious," says Constance. "This was going to be light entertainment for people – while their brains slowly collapsed to mush."

"There were a few longer jams that didn't make it," adds Nyoukis, "not because we didn't dig them, they just didn't fit with the vibe."

Scattered throughout the five episodes are pieces possessed with a distinct feeling of menace and lurking fear. Of these, Glands Of External Secretion's *Lost Weekday*, with its scenes of vegetable eyeball evisceration, Jonnie Prey's worrying *The Menopause Scarecrow*, and The Dan, Rakel & Klara Fröberg Experience's witchy *Safe At Home With* being three flickeringly frightening examples.

"Almost all of these videos were made by people during lockdown," says Nyoukis. "They were stuck indoors and navel gazing, self-reflecting, slowly going off their rockers. I think that really shows. There's a lot of gallows humour in there too."

One of *PTTV*'s funniest highlights is the film of Nyoukis raking at a pile of rakes in the garden. It made me laugh out loud at the sheer absurdity of the

Lockdown led to an explosion of films and broadcasts as musicians sought different modes of transmission. **Edwin Pouncey** reveals the hidden wiring of Brighton's anarchic *Plague Time Television*

action. "Ha! Yes, the raking piece is deffo meant to be laughed at," says Nyoukis. "Everything is up for laughs. man. That was filmed next to our allotment."

This constant flow of wild ideas, strange sounds and baffling behaviour gives *PTTV* an edge over its more furrowed browed competitors in the current field of streamed improvisational broadcasting. I ask for their personal highlights from the cornucopia of craziness that they found themselves having to sort through. "One for me was Jérôme Noetinger and Liz Rác," reveals Constance. "Typical wonder from him on tapes, but with the added tape monster element from her for that visual pep."

"Together with the bonus of when the tape monster got snagged on the door handle while she was making her exit," adds Nyoukis.

Aside from such unplanned Z-movie prop blunders, did they receive any surprises from contributors that they weren't expecting?

"Man, Rick Potts [from Los Angeles Free Music Society] got a surprise," reports Nyoukis. "He had been suffering some back pain during the filming of his *PTTV* set, then fell ill for a few days after. Eventually he found out that he had suffered a heart attack!"

Mercifully Potts has survived to improvise for another day, but what future *does Plague Time Television* have, if any, now that the pair have decided to terminate the project? "We probably have an hour or so of that unused stuff," notes Constance, "we will probably upload it on to the internet as *Plague Time Jammers*."

Despite the promise of a gradual return to 'normality', if no quick fix for the pandemic materialises in the coming months perhaps *PTTV* will be the only option to keep the duo's regular Colour Out Of Space festival up and running, I suggest. "Ideally we'll be pressing doughy flesh for Colour Out Of Space 2021," anticipates Nyoukis. "Failing that maybe we will have to do it online again – but I pray to fuck not." □