

## Seymour Wright

By Nick Cain

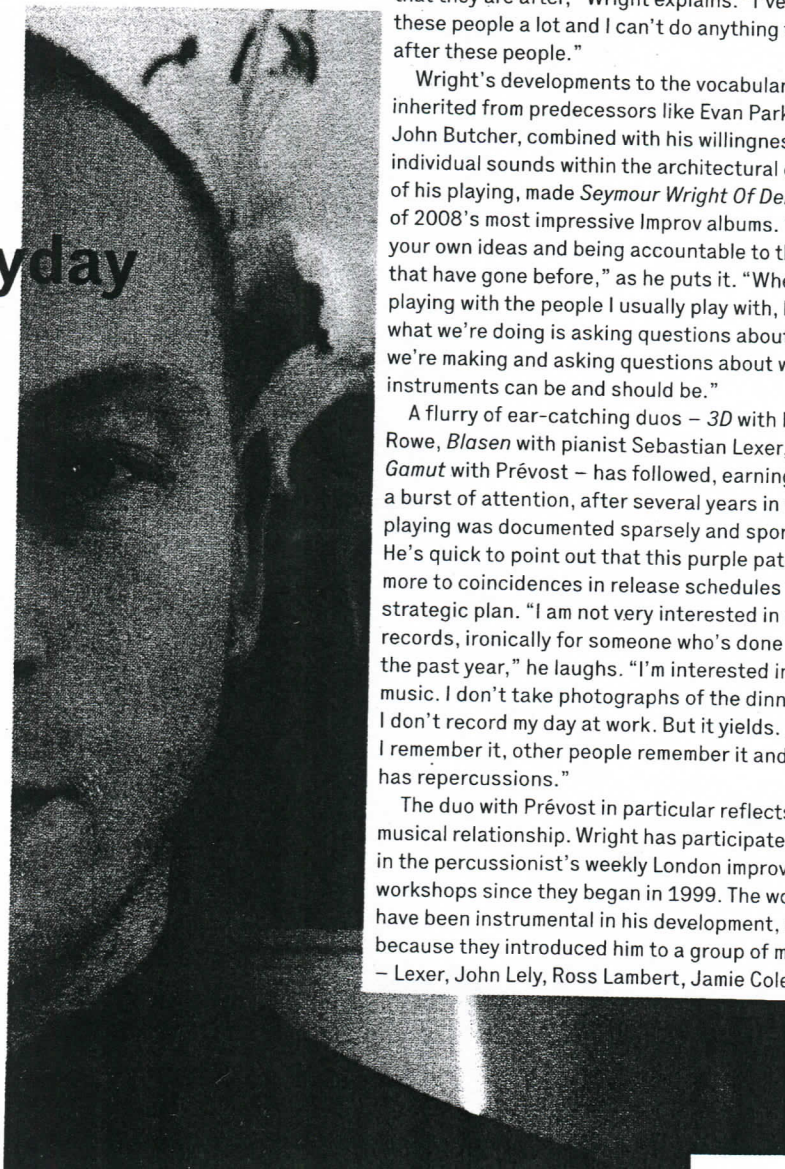
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## Revolution

in

everyday

life



Half Wright

"I often think of people in the middle of a piece. That will then inform the way I'm thinking as I'm playing," remarks Seymour Wright. "Just like when you're walking down the street and you see something that will remind you of something else. I don't approach a piece of music thinking, 'These things are going to happen', far from it. I start playing and then things will happen."

The London based alto saxophonist is explaining the structure of the track titles on his solo debut, *Seymour Wright Of Derby*. Each of the album's four improvisations carries a subtitle listing its points of reference. On "The Wright Balance – After Billy Higgins & Eddie Prévost", Wright's use of a battery fan in addition to his saxophone alludes directly to the AMM drummer's deployment of similar devices. And Billy Higgins is mentioned because Wright had one of his drum solos in mind at the time. The two sound sources are woven into an eloquent, elongated discourse. "The important thing about the 'after' is that they are after," Wright explains. "I've listened to these people a lot and I can't do anything that isn't after these people."

Wright's developments to the vocabulary he has inherited from predecessors like Evan Parker and John Butcher, combined with his willingness to isolate individual sounds within the architectural overview of his playing, made *Seymour Wright Of Derby* one of 2008's most impressive Improv albums. "Having your own ideas and being accountable to the ideas that have gone before," as he puts it. "When I'm playing with the people I usually play with, I think what we're doing is asking questions about the music we're making and asking questions about what our instruments can be and should be."

A flurry of ear-catching duos – *3D* with Keith Rowe, *Blasen* with pianist Sebastian Lexer, and *Gamut* with Prévost – has followed, earning Wright a burst of attention, after several years in which his playing was documented sparsely and sporadically. He's quick to point out that this purple patch is due more to coincidences in release schedules than any strategic plan. "I am not very interested in making records, ironically for someone who's done four in the past year," he laughs. "I'm interested in playing music. I don't take photographs of the dinners I cook, I don't record my day at work. But it yields. I remember it, other people remember it and it has repercussions."

The duo with Prévost in particular reflects a long musical relationship. Wright has participated regularly in the percussionist's weekly London improvisation workshops since they began in 1999. The workshops have been instrumental in his development, not least because they introduced him to a group of musicians – Lexer, John Lely, Ross Lambert, Jamie Coleman and

Nat Catchpole among them – with whom he has since formed strong partnerships.

In his *Gamut* sleeve notes, Wright articulates his philosophy of music making as "a mode of learning and education through open, informal enquiry, experience and reflection", predicated on "the sharing of contexts, environments and acts" and fundamentally concerned with "life, being" – inseparable from and symbiotically linked to activities such as working, reading, sleeping or eating.

"When the workshop first began, I would always think about when it actually started," he elaborates. "Did it start at 6:30 or seven o'clock? Or did it start earlier on that day or did it start the day before? And when did it finish – with us leaving the room or me arriving home? So when you start to think like that, it becomes difficult to separate the music from the living. It's not like as soon as I pick up a saxophone I'm a musician, and as soon as I put it down I'm something else."

"I go to work and there are things that happen in the working day that make me think that can be reapplied to the saxophone," he continues, "just like there are things from the saxophone that can be reapplied to the working day. I could be listening to Art Blakey and it might become part of the saxophone playing. Or I might be listening to Art Blakey in the kitchen and it becomes part of the dinner. Those kind of relationships and triggers are crucial, fundamental."

Wright is well aware of the complications of the improvisational process, in both its creation and its interpretation. In his notes accompanying *3D* (a triple CD set, each disc containing a different recording of the same 2002 concert), he expressed his frustration with "one-dimensional, product based accord" – music documented on and understood through the fixed medium of CDs, a notion at odds with his concept of music as bound up in the vagaries of life.

The rigour of his critique is matched by the strength of his optimism in improvisation's myriad possibilities, which he extols with a quiet but cogent conviction. "It is positive music, because anything can happen, and it's about ideas and people having their own ideas, enjoying other people's ideas, working with them. To me that's brilliant, that's deeply positive, in every realm of life. That way of playing, where the learning is what's happening, can yield endlessly. Maybe that is utopian. I think that the workshop itself is like that. Imagine if everybody was committed to something like that, not necessarily musical, on a semi-regular basis – what kind of impact that would have. On everything." □ *Blasen* is on *Another Timbre*; *Gamut* is on *Matchless*; *3D* can be downloaded from [mattin.org.seymourwright.com](http://mattin.org.seymourwright.com). Seymour Wright performs at Glasgow's Instal festival this month: see [Out There](#)