

INTERVIEW TO KELUAR

We are very happy to show you today this interview with the minimal-wave/experimental band **Keluar**, formed by the duo **Zoè Zanias** and **Sid Lamar**, because it's very important to us; we spoke about them in different occasions, both in our review of their self-titled compilation under **Desire records**, and in our report of their live show in Milan at **Spazio Ligerà**, where they played with **Schonwald**. We are happy because we believe in this project that manages to sound like no one else in a scene where this isn't very easy, and because in this interview we had the chance to go in deep with them about their ideas about not only music, but life, biology, psychology and human relationships; they gave us a series of answers where they showed how banality is not an option for them in any of their outputs.

- 1) Hi guys! First of all, thank you for your time and for this interview. Your project is, I dare say, one of the best things that happened in the “underground” spectrum of electronic music since quite some time; I think there is a undeniable synergy between the dark and sometimes cold music and the rich, strong, and emotional vocal textures, and it's really shown during your live performances. You just had a series of concerts in Italy, how did it go?

Z: Thank you for the kind words. Our concerts in Italy went very well, we always love playing there since it's a beautiful country to travel in, the food is amazing and the trains are cheap. The audiences at our shows weren't the biggest we've had on this last tour, but they were extremely supportive.

- 2) Let's talk a bit about the Keluar word and the cover artwork of your last album. I would ask you when and how you've found this word and what its meaning “going outside” is referred to. I would also know what's the meaning behind your last release cover artwork.

Z: ‘Keluar’ can be found on every ‘Exit’ sign in Malaysia and Indonesia. It's a very familiar sight to me because I grew up in those countries, and it doesn't really mean anything all that deep to us. It's just a word. The cover artwork for the Vitreum EP and our self-titled compilation CD are both photos I took through a microscope, and feature the same common substance at different levels of magnification. As the word ‘Vitreum’ means glass and the song references **J.G. Ballard's** ‘Crystal World’, I wanted the EP to feature a crystalline texture on its cover – also to act as an opposing image to Ennoea's liquid reds and blacks. The self-titled CD cover feels like a middle ground between the two. It is a photo of crystal formations with a softer focus, appearing more like liquid... and they also happen to somewhat resemble neurons. Glassy, crystalized forms (‘vitrea’) and the fluidity of the mind (‘ennoea’) are merged in a single image.

- 3) I find that your music somehow is something familiar, but at the same time new: you use some musical elements and “topoi” that comes very much from this age and time (especially in the indie/experimental/minimal scene), but in a unique evocative way that makes the difference. How do you write music? Is there a specific modus operandi, or is it always a different and spontaneous process?

S: A lot of times the composing process is a real struggle. It is easy to come up with something that works, but it can turn into a long seek to make it something special. Sometimes, we start with a certain musical draft, which then may not be detectable in the final version anymore. The draft was already “kind of good”, but may have lacked something to create a special atmosphere. You need to be very sensitive to understand what the music is trying to tell you. It only takes putting a few building blocks together and they start interacting and pointing to several directions. It can take a while to understand where a musical idea wants to go.

Z: To me there’s definitely a feeling of ‘discovery’ in our composition process. We’re not setting out with a clear vision of what we want and creating it, but moving through a number of ideas until we find what we didn’t know we were looking for. We’re both very particular about what we will allow into the world under our name, so it can take a lot of passing a song back and forth before we’re both happy with it.

4) Let’s talk a bit about the lyrics of your songs: after having read the lyrics of your recent compilation (Selftitled, 2014, Desire records), I’ve found them particularly interesting. In particular, these have a strong focus on nature and natural elements, especially water, and on some sort of religious concepts (I think about Ennoea). It seems to me that water is associated with some particular emotional state of mind. Can you explain me how and why?

Z: First off, I want to clarify that I don’t intend to imply anything religious with the word ‘Ennoea’. I am using its Greek meaning that refers to the workings of the mind, its intentions and thoughts. Religion is not something I currently work with, lyrically.

The references I make to water come so naturally that it wasn't until people started commenting on them that I realised how often I make them. I’ve always felt very close to nature (a biologist parent will make sure of that), in particular the ocean. Something about the beauty of its surface and the terrifying mysteries of its depths capture my imagination in ways that few other habitats do. My fondest childhood memories were formed on the coasts of Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia, but I never lived by the sea so I’ve spent most of my life yearning for it. Perhaps I’ve therefore subconsciously associated coastlines with a sense of nostalgia and longing, and the way emotions can come over you in waves feels metaphorically so similar to how it feels to be caught in surges of surf and tides.

Then there’s simply the physical feature of water, and all liquids, which inspires me and forms an important part of my worldview. A liquid’s molecules are always sliding past one another, keeping it in a constant state of flux and movement. The entire universe seems to be subject to constant movement in this way, and its especially observable in our very own minds. People love to believe their ‘selves’ to be solid structures capable of weathering the storm that is life, but really we’re all just convoluted masses of memories, thoughts and desires that are never the same from one moment to the next. We are fluid entities, incapable of stability but endlessly changing and adapting. That is something to be embraced, and it’s what makes our emotional lives so interesting.

5) Zoè is a great singer and performer, she has such a charisma and passion that is very rare in the minimalistic and static kind of genre you do; I would like to know if she had other artistic experiences before Keluar and her previous project Linea Aspera.

Z: Until Linea Aspera formed I was pretty convinced I was going to have a life in academia, so my main form of artistic expression was singing alone in my room. Performance was always something I craved though, and at school I often took part in theatre productions and sung in the choir. I think my desire to be on stage surprised people a little bit, as I was rather shy and reserved. No one ever told me I could sing, so I assumed it wasn't something anyone wanted to hear.

6) I think Sid's way of composing is very interesting: sometimes you find different elements all mashed up in a single song with a very unpredictable songwriting, and it creates a very dynamic mood that keeps the listener attention very high and that moves him. I would like to know about his influences.

S: I have a degree in Electronic Composition, which mainly dealt with Electroacoustic Music and contemporary instrumental music. I also learned basics like theory of harmony and counterpoint. So I spent a lot of time listening to music very analytically. I try not to make use of any technique for Keluar, but just knowing about them certainly influences my music at least subconsciously.

I have always been interested in rather percussion/beat driven music. Plus it has to have a "groove". Atmosphere is another very strong "parameter" that adds a whole different dimension to music. Bass and beat as body triggers, spaces and ambience as emotional triggers.

7) What do you want to conjure with your music? A vision, an atmosphere, a message, all of these?

Z: Musically there are certainly atmospheres being conjured, and lyrically there are messages but they tend to come to me without much intention. I never sit down to write a song about a specific theme, but instead direct the lyrics towards whatever it is the music makes me spontaneously feel when I listen to it. Usually I'm telling a very real and specific autobiographical story using deceptively phantasmagorical language. I guess the resulting 'communication' can mean whatever it makes the listener feel. It doesn't matter to me what that specifically is so long as it moves them in some way. My personal story can become theirs.

8) In the last few years we have seen the rise of a neo-minimal scene in which your music is generically collocated. In what measure do you think that the 80s minimalistic music phenomenon affected what you're doing in your music and, of course, what we're listening nowadays by labels like Desire records, to name one?

Z: Well it certainly influenced us by being part of what we listen to, but our musical backgrounds consist of so much more than Minimal Wave re-issues so really it's just one facet among many that led to us sounding as we do. I still find myself reeling at the absurdity of the fact that we're a bunch of bipedal apes that gain so much pleasure from flailing our limbs about to patterned soundwaves, so trying to contemplate how we came about listening to the particular soundwaves we do at this point in

time becomes a bit overwhelming. I try to just take things as they are, and can at the very least observe that the resurgence of this particular 80s sound probably had something to do with the internet allowing previously rare recordings to be shared among like-minded individuals across the globe. People take it for granted just how unique our times are: recorded music has only been around for a century, and the enormous cloud of data we spend our lives in is basically still an infant. Of course a few seemingly odd trends will occur. In our own musical creation though, Sid and I are 21st century inhabitants through and through, and any anachronisms detected in us are probably down to utilizing a similar toolkit.

9) Do you already have any plans for the future of Keluar, or are you now only concentrated on this momentum?

Z: We have plans to release another EP, and continue writing new material all the time. This year will also see us touring in some places we've never been before.