

British synth wizard James Holden meets Polish clarinet guru Waclaw Zimpel to form Holden & Zimpel: a collaborative alliance wherein these two versatile modern composers might explore their deepest improvisational urges in an intimate setting, to strikingly lush, hypnotic and deeply emotive effect. Two like-minded masters of their instrument come together in an in-the-moment lyrical conversation between alto clarinet and modular synth, cementing the joyful convergence of their disparate musical journeys in an explosion of raw musical creativity in its most primal form.

Long established in their own respective fields of electronica and jazz, Holden & Zimpel's paths would first cross at the 2018 edition of The Hague's Rewire Festival, where mutual feelings of respect drove the pair to seek each other out for an introduction. Their first recordings happened later that year in Holden's London studio, during four snatched days of between-shows downtime for Waclaw, where the pair committed to laying down one composition a day to gradually assemble a four track EP of deliciously krauty in-the-moment improvisations. The resulting richly textured *Long Weekend EP* pitted Holden's handmade modular synth rig against Zimpel's multifariously expressive alto clarinet, judiciously supplemented by organ, voice, assorted percussion and (on *Tuesday & Wednesday*) the Balearic-tinged guitar playing of Zimpel's long-time collaborator Jakub Ziolek, making for an immersive and transcendent lost weekend of deep listening.

With this initial release emerging on the eve of the pandemic, the duo's first scheduled live performances across Europe had to be squeezed in around lockdowns, where the intimate, all-enveloping warmth of their electro-acoustic explorations proved to be a good fit for the fully seated socially-distanced concert settings which proliferated as the world began to open back up. And whenever Waclaw found himself with a day off in London the experiments would continue in Holden's studio, nudging the pair inevitably towards their next release: the blissful escapism of 2025's lush *The Universe Will Take Care Of You* album. Embracing a similar playful, experimental approach to that of their Krautrock forefathers, the new album sees both virtuosos encouraged and empowered to reach out beyond the instruments with which they made their name. Thus Holden supplements his bespoke computer and modular synth systems with his long-neglected childhood violin and his more recently cobbled together collection of hand percussion, whilst on some songs Zimpel forgoes his alto clarinet altogether in favour of electric piano, organ, lap steel guitar, airless harmonium and the Indian twin pipe algoza flute.

The collaborative process has proved endlessly instructive, mutually inspirational and richly rewarding for both artists. "We just clicked immediately, understood each other's impulses, made space for each other," enthuses Holden. "Held safe in his supportive arms I felt liberated to try things I'd never tried before." And when you find someone that you vibe with musically in this way, it is only natural that you would want to continue the adventure together. Theirs is a partnership which thrives in live performance, and both are hungry for further opportunities to explore the improvisational permutations of their new material in a live setting, beginning with Poland's prestigious 3x3x3 concert series in November 2024.

The Holden & Zimpel musical origin stories may on the surface look very different, with Holden first making his name in electronic music as an internationally renowned dance DJ, producer and remixer throughout the course of the noughties, whilst Zimpel

was receiving a formal classical education at music schools in Poland and Germany before following his improvisational impulses into the world of contemporary free jazz, collaborating with the likes of Hamid Drake and Joe McPhee. But there are also many striking serendipitous similarities in their musical journeys: both young musicians' first exposure to music came via their piano-playing fathers, and both children initially took up violin before settling upon their chosen instruments. Both have had the privilege of immersing themselves in the rich Gnawa musical tradition handed down via Morocco's Guinia family, with Holden recording first with the late Maalem Mahmoud Guinia and later his son Houssam, whilst in 2012 and again in 2015 Zimpel improvised his way around Poland in a live collaboration with Mahmoud's younger brother Mokhtar. The traditional music of India has also provided a common source of fascination for the two composers, with Zimpel teaming up with a band of Carnatic musicians from Bangalore for three raga-jazz fusion albums under the Saagara moniker, whilst Holden's introduction came via modern day Indian music disciple Terry Riley, and the Mumbai-trained London-based tabla player Camilo Tirado with whom he collaborated on the Riley-inspired Barbican commission *Outdoor Museum of Fractals*.

And just at the point where Holden began to flirt with jazz improvisation by drafting in a raft of brass and woodwind soloists for the live takes of his 2017 album *The Animal Spirits*, the hypnotic loops and arpeggios of the electronic world were simultaneously calling to "musical chameleon" Zimpel (The New York Times). Recent years have seen Waclaw add a pair of critically-acclaimed collaborative albums with one-of-a-kind electronic auteur Shackleton to his expansive oeuvre, as well as stepping into a producer role to embrace the experimental possibilities of modern electronics on his own solo releases: 2020's synthesizer-heavy *Massive Oscillations* and *Ebbing In The Tide* (which employs an innovative 'Pitch Gate' looper plug-in which he co-created with Holden to flesh out his single clarinet line into an other-worldly choir of woodwinds), and the sample-manipulating *Trainspotter* (2023).

Ultimately it is around a shared love of all things hypnotic and trancey where Holden and Zimpel's paths converge. Trance is the common thread which runs through their musical predilections, as heard in traditional folk forms the world over, twentieth century minimalism, the Krautrock experiments of the seventies, electronic dance music and improvised jazz alike, and their music exists at the point where all of this good stuff collides. You are invited to join them in trance space.

holden & zimpel : discography

long weekend ep	2020	border community
the universe will take care of you	2025	border community

Live Bookings: www.earth-agency.com

www.jamesholden.org

www.waclawzimpel.pl

www.bordercommunity.com