

Trout Mask House: Beefheart and The Magic Band

Venue: Cunard building and Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool 2019-20

50 years since Captain Beefheart's groundbreaking rock album Trout Mask Replica Tyman & Webster will recreate the house in LA where it was developed, the new installation providing a stage for live music and debate, as artists, musicians and poets explore creativity, structure and improvisation, reflecting on the LP's relevance today and Beefheart as interdisciplinary artist. With audience engagement, it will target Beefheart fans and wider music, art and live literature audiences. The project lead is artist Derek Tyman with Andy Webster a co-researcher. It is a partnership with Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool and many artists and has support from Liverpool City Council/Culture Liverpool.

Story

US underground band Captain Beefheart & The Magic Band spent 9 months in 1968 living in near isolation in a wooden Los Angeles house, writing and rehearsing what became Trout Mask Replica. On release, the LP radically redefined rock, compressing and synthesising blues, jazz and the European avant-garde with Surrealism and Dada's poetic strategies. The LP continues to split critical and public opinion. A work of genius, a radical leap into the future, or a step too far, a pseudo hoax. John Peel said that if anything in pop music history could be described as a work of art, Trout Mask Replica is probably it. The iconic LP has been a continual touchstone for musicians and artists working across disciplines and with structure and improvisation. Stories of its production are mythic – focusing on the band's time in the cabin, marathon rehearsal sessions, starvation and being subject to Beefheart's abuse. Reviewer John Robinson wrote, "An album has approximately the same relationship to where it was made as a crime does to its scene – Trout Mask Replica more than most" (2013).

As primary focus and reference point for the project, *Trout Mask House: Beefheart and The Magic Band*, we will make, with the assistance of a small production team, a scaled down reconstruction, a 'replica', of the late 1960s cabin. Alongside it, we will make a full-scale reconstruction of the interior lounge/rehearsal space. Sited at Liverpool City Council's Cunard building, and supported by Culture Liverpool, the installations will provide a starting point for invited artists, poets and musicians to make new work exploring the album's mythology and contemporary relevance. Magic Band drummer John French remains key to developing the project and has put us in touch with other band members. They described to us from memory the cabin decor and contents. No contemporary photos exist but two of the band have drawn it. We have contacted Lynn Aronspear who lived in the cabin later, and the current owner. Acting under guidance and provided with detailed architectural drawings from Derek Tyman, he has taken images of the building inside and out and made detailed measurements.

45 years after Beefheart's first art exhibition at Bluecoat, in 2017 the venue hosted a project considering him as 'total artist' involved in music, art, writing and performance. Trout Mask House engages with a similar mix, its more nuanced, in-depth reflection on the artist potentially attracting a wider, more intergenerational audience, with a live programme of music, talks, discussion and local music group residency, selected to reflect and explore this art form breadth (see below draft programme, still in progress). As project partner, Bluecoat will help programme the space and host a paving event in 2019/20.

Crucially, the project is about the creative process today and explores and makes manifest ideas of co-curation, audiences' active participation in art, collaboration between artists, and the dynamic between freedom and constraint.

Beefheart is a seminal figure in contemporary music, *Trout Mask Replica* his 'masterpiece'. The record appears in countless lists of 'best albums' alongside such classics as Dylan's 'Blonde on Blonde', Public Enemy's 'It Takes A Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back', Michael Jackson's 'Thriller', Miles Davis' 'Kind of Blue', The Beatles' 'Sgt. Pepper'. In 2011, the album entered the US Library of Congress' National Recording Registry. In 2013, a newly remastered version was issued on vinyl and immediately sold out. The band have been the subject of two extensive documentaries including the acclaimed 'The Artist Formerly Known As Captain Beefheart'. The album was recently the subject of a BBC radio programme.

The album's 50th anniversary will undoubtedly be celebrated nationally and internationally and receive extensive media coverage in both the music and broadsheet press. The *Trout Mask* project, featuring input from the original musicians alongside contemporary musicians and interdisciplinary artists has great potential to benefit from this interest.

Crucially, the project's discursive, multidisciplinary form, initiated by contemporary visual artists will also reflect modes of current art practice and the creative process today: exploring and making manifest ideas of co-curation, audiences' active participation in art, and collaboration between artists across platforms.

Confirmed participants for the programme:

Bryan Biggs, Artistic Director, Bluecoat, Liverpool, is assisting and advising with the development of the project and Bluecoat will support its realisation.

John Hyatt, Professor in Contemporary Art at Liverpool John Moores University, School of Art and Design, Research Leader for the School and Director of ART LABS. He is also an acclaimed artist and was singer/songwriter with legendary post-punk band, The Three Johns. He has confirmed that his band John Hyatt's Plastic Reality will participate.

Kyle Percy, independent curator. In 2017 with poet Chris McCabe and Bryan Biggs, he co-organised the Captain Beefheart Weekend in Liverpool and has confirmed he will participate in a talk.

John 'Drumbo' French, original Magic Band drummer who played on *Trout Mask Replica*, has confirmed he will contribute to the discussions to accompany the project.

Cosey Fanni Tutti, performance artist, musician, and writer, best known for her work with UK Beefheart-inspired avant-garde group Throbbing Gristle, and exhibitions at Tate Modern and ICA, London - will discuss the influence of *Trout Mask Replica* on her work in the paving event at Bluecoat.

Elaine Shepherd, made the acclaimed BBC documentary *The Artist Formerly Known as Captain Beefheart* narrated by John Peel, and has provided me with unseen footage of *Trout Mask House* - has confirmed she will participate in the project and is interested to document some of the talks/events.

Stewart Lee, acclaimed comedian and music writer who has collaborated on music projects with musicians Steve Beresford and Tania Chan, has confirmed he will perform with Capri-Batterie and talk about his interest in Captain Beefheart.

Capri-Batterie, avant/industrial jazz trio based in Bristol. Stewart Lee and the band recently released an album *Bristol Fashion*, with Lee improvising surreal and humorous lyrics backed by the trio - have confirmed they will perform new work in the 'red room' with Lee.

Andy Webster, artist and academic whose projects relate to music and have been broadcast live on radio will perform a new turntable scratch piece for the project and assist with production and on site construction of the installations.

Darren Ray, artist and sometime collaborator with artist Andy Webster will assist with the production and on site construction of the installations.

Chris McCabe, widely-published poet and Joint Librarian of the Poetry Library, Southbank Centre, London, and was co-organiser of the *Captain Beefheart Weekend* at Bluecoat in November 2017 - he will perform and curate poets to contribute to the project.

Gillian Wylde, visual artist who works with film, language, text, sound, performance, installation and digital formats - has confirmed she will develop a new film/performance work (including student participation) for the project.

a.P.A.t.T., mixed gender Liverpool music collective who create multi-disciplinary works. Have been invited to participate and occupy the gallery/reconstructed 'red room' space for a week - the group's Steve Cole has confirmed their interest and he has also confirmed he will produce a new piano work inspired by *Trout Mask Replica*.

Helen Reddington, musician, writer and academic. She is the author of *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era* featuring interviews with The Slits, Gina Birch, etc. - has confirmed she will participate in the programme of discussions.

Peter Gordon, American experimental composer and Professor of Music Technology at Bloomfield College, New York. As a teenager in the 1960s he visited Trout Mask House, Woodland Hills - has confirmed he will participate in the programme of discussions.

Matthew Bourne, pianist and composer based in West Yorkshire. In 2001, he was the winner of the Perrier Jazz Award and has received an award for innovation at the BBC Radio Jazz Awards - has confirmed he will produce a new piano work inspired by *Trout Mask Replica*.

David Toop, musician and sound curator. Exhibitions curated include *Sonic Boom* for the Hayward Gallery, and *Playing John Cage* for Arnolfini Bristol. He is Professor and Chair of Audio Culture and Improvisation at the London College of Communication - has confirmed he will participate in the programme of discussions and improvise a new work with Tania Chen in the 'red room'.

Tania Chen, a performance and sound artist working nationally and internationally. In 2015, she participated in the Captain Beefheart Festival, Berkeley Arts Festival, California - has confirmed she will participate in the programme of discussions and improvise a new work with David Toop in the 'red room'.

Samuel Andreyev, writer, composer and performer. His vocal, chamber, and orchestral compositions are performed in countries around the world. He is Professor of Musical Analysis at the Conservatoire de Cambrai and has posted a series of acclaimed interviews with members of the Magic Band online -he has confirmed he will participate in a discussion.

David Stubbs, music journalist and author of *Fear Of Music: Why People Get Rothko But Don't Get Stockhausen* - has confirmed he will participate in a discussion.

Ben Watson, writer, musician and acknowledged authority on Frank Zappa (who produced *Trout Mask Replica*). In 2011, he wrote a powerful and moving Captain Beefheart obituary for the publication *Radical Philosophy* - has confirmed he will participate in a discussion.

Mike Barnes, author of *Captain Beefheart: The Biography*. His views on *Trout Mask Replica* were recorded by the Library of Congress, Washington DC and in 2018 he appeared on Radio 4's *Great Lives* discussing Beefheart - has confirmed he will participate in a discussion.

Fliss Kitson, musician, ex-Violet Violet, now plays drums in legendary post-punk band The Nightingales. She names John French's drumming as one of her main influences - has confirmed she will participate in the programme of discussions (and possibly play live with John French).

Alan Dunn, artist lives and works in the Wirral. His work explores new models for curating content for non-gallery audiences and the relationship between sound art and the everyday - has confirmed he will participate in discussion and possibly develop a related work.

Robyn Hitchcock, iconic English singer-songwriter and cult figure - a musicians' musician who has recorded more than 20 albums. In 2011, he toured as Robyn Hitchcock and the Imaginary Band, playing Beefheart's *Clear Spot* album in its entirety - he is touring in the UK in October and hopes to play in the 'red room', however, if he is unable to, he would write something for the project.

Emily Lansley, musician in Liverpool-based electro pop band Stealing Sheep. They have released two albums, supported Alt-J and St Vincent, performed the songs of David Lynch at the Barbican, London, and collaborated with the Radiophonic Workshop.

Andy Partridge, musician with innovative chart topping new wave band XTC, as well as releasing acclaimed solo albums - has indicated that he'd like to write something about *Trout Mask Replica* to be included in the exhibition.

John Detreich, musician with highly acclaimed US band Deefhoof, who have also worked with Laurie Anderson and Yoko Ono - has expressed an interest in sending either a new piece of music or a video to be integrated into the exhibition.