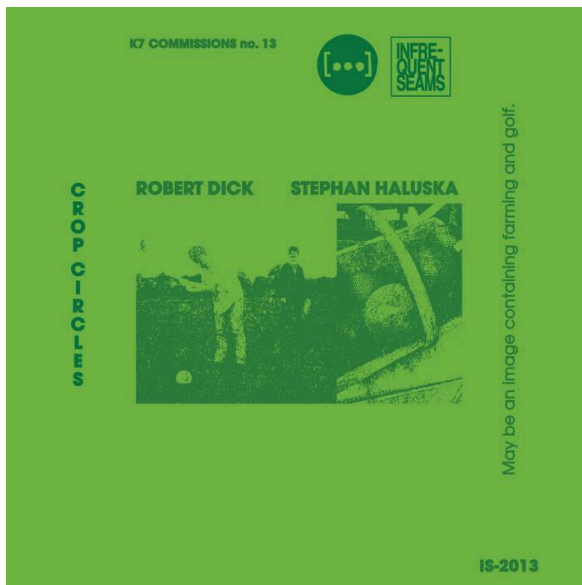


## CUSP: Dick & Haluska redefine instruments at *Crop Circles* CD release party

by Max Newman



“We kind of wanted to explore the more aesthetically non-traditional approaches to playing our instruments.”

This was how harpist Stephan Haluska described his main musical goal on his album *Crop Circles*, made in collaboration with visionary flutist Robert Dick and released on January 19. The album’s release will be celebrated on Friday, January 26 at 8:00 pm at the Convivium 33 Gallery, when Dick and Haluska will be joined by the Max Hyde-Perry Ensemble in a presentation by the Cleveland Uncommon Sound Project.

“Honing into the weirder approaches to what we can get out of a flute and harp duo was, conceptually, the only thing we wanted to do going into this. Everything is improvised,” Haluska said during a recent telephone conversation.

This largely reflects Haluska’s own musical goals. Throughout his career, he has strived to push the boundaries of what the harp can do.

“A lot of it comes back to me wanting to make the harp sound like other instruments. It’s very limiting if I’m just playing strings, and everything sounds traditional. When I really started getting into music, exploring timbres that you may not associate with the harp is definitely something that spoke to me.”

Haluska takes inspiration for his style of playing from a wide range of sources. Intriguingly, he even likened his technique to electronic music, including in the way he restricts certain frequencies manually through the use of “preparations,” or objects

attached to the instrument. “I’m engaging my listening in the way that someone with a synthesizer might be engaging their listening.”

It is this inventive mindset that drew Haluska and collaborator Robert Dick together. Dick has been pushing boundaries as a flutist, composer, and improviser for over four decades, driven by the idea that acoustic instruments can be played as human-powered synthesizers, and by his love of continuous transformation of sound. He is perhaps best known for inventing the Glissando Headjoint, described as bringing the sound of the flute closer to the human voice.

So when Dick and Haluska first met in 2021, there was an instant spark.

“We met here in Cleveland,” said Haluska, who hosted Dick as part of the concert series for the Cleveland Uncommon Sound Project, where the harpist serves as managing director. “He expressed interest in wanting to work with some local improvisers, so I played with him and we hit it off. We continued the correspondence, and he invited me to record with him the following summer.”

It was a whirlwind experience for Haluska, who first saw Dick perform when he was an undergrad at Bowling Green over a decade before. But it was also a fruitful one.

“The recording was actually our first time playing as a duo, and I thought it turned out great. We started talking about what we wanted to do with it, and he suggested reaching out to this label Infrequent Seams. He approached them, and basically we got an immediate response. So we recorded in July of 2022 and we got it mixed pretty quickly, in a matter of a couple months.”

As for the music itself, Haluska described *Crop Circles* as visceral and cathartic.

“You’re hearing a lot of raw sound. Like, you’re hearing Robert coughing, and sort of clearing his voice. We chose to make the album more human by leaving in a lot of these moments, and there’s a certain level of charm that comes with that. It’s not like, ‘this is when the piece begins, and this is when it ends.’ It’s all very natural. We have these sounds of *us* in there.”

Haluska doesn’t normally play on the Cleveland Uncommon Sound Project series, but he couldn’t think of a better place to hold the event than the Convivium 33 gallery, the series’ home venue.

“The space is incredible. It’s an enormous deconsecrated Catholic church sanctuary, gutted and remodeled and converted into an art gallery. A lot of the art is absolutely

massive, so you step inside, and you're like, 'whoa.' Everything in there just sounds amazing. I've only played there a couple of times, so it's really nice to be able to bring my own projects into that space.”

The performance will not just be visually interesting for its setting, though — there are also Haluska's prepared materials. “Some of these are clipped on, or are attached to the strings, or are things that dangle. I try to find what both sounds good and looks cool — I try to create this kind of multimedia aspect.”

It promises to be a glorious sonic adventure from Dick and Haluska — idiosyncratic, mind-bending, invigorating, and, at the center of it all, pushing musical boundaries to extraordinary places.

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