**Thanks for being happy to answer some questions - I'm sorry these are a bit general, mostly, but it's really just about getting a sense of the history of the group (some of which was covered in Yuri's notes already) and the intent - I feel like you were the driving force behind Dress...**

Not really, I brought lots of ideas but so did everybody. It was Kristen’s band to start with…

1. Could you tell me more about the music you were writing for theatre around the time of Dress? e.g. *The Navigator*, the performance in Wales, etc.?

I can’t remember how we got involved in The Navigators, a film/live theatre piece. Probably Stuart Porter ran into Alan Brunton at the local supermarket in Island Bay and he asked him to help. He knew them from their Red Mole days. Red Mole was one of New Zealand’s best known avant-garde theatre companies in New Zealand. Not boring. Sam Neill even made a doco about one of their Kiwi tours. I was pulled in on viola, but didn’t really compose, just provided background colour. All recorded on the 16-track at Angry Dog Studios Stuart Porter and Brendon Ryniker ran where TGATF put some of Eyes Rind in the can.

Sally Rodwell (Alan’s partner in life and Red Mole) asked me to write and perform music for her new play with Madeline McNamara - Crow Station. Madeline had toured the USA in Red Mole before they almost hit the big time in New York in the early ‘80s with spoken word poetry. Robin Nathan was the musical director, very experienced, she’d had a top ten hit in NZ as a songwriter. I mostly drew on gamelan riffs I’d been learning at Jack Body’s free lunchtime workshops at Victoria University. Mostly, we collaborated. I found it a real slog writing alone at home on the piano. The show was quite absurdist - about the Nobodies, two women who carried their homes on their backs, “homeless and hapless”, but Sybils, nonetheless.

In 1994, after one season at Taki Rua Theatre, we got invited to the Magdalena Women’s Theatre Festival in Cardiff, Wales. It was the anniversary of Women’s Suffrage in NZ so grants were growing on trees. We even had a per diem! The Festival was packed with pretty serious hard core thespians. The Czech woman who sewed her skin to the stage, technically brilliant. The younger performers jostling to be noticed by the British TV scouts in the audience.

We played most of the music live with a few prerecorded pieces. I started off the play improvising on an accordion then switched to viola. We had minor parts in the action and were dressed up like low key Pierrots. We had free digs at the University of Cardiff. There were theatre workshops and meets during the day but no pressure from my troop to attend. I was rather shy and spent most of my time before the show on buses eating chocolate biscuits, entranced by my fellow Welsh speaking passengers.

Madeline went on to direct Rose Beauchamp’s ecologically-themed puppet play, ‘Stone Telling’ in 1995, and roped *moi* in to write the score. Rose Beauchamp had been in Red Mole and was a great niece of the writer Katherine Mansfield, I thought she had a similar refined creativity. I felt a bit out of my depth so asked Kristen to jump in. Kristen and Torben Tilly had been friends since kindy, and Heath Cozens (TGATF’s first bass player) was part of the same crew. They’d all gone to Wellington High School in Mt Cook, considered a more “creative” school. We played the whole ‘score’ live on stage dressed as Victorian women. Kristen’s super catchy keyboard theme for the environmentally transgressive character ‘Trucky’ has stayed with me to this day… It was us, Rose on the puppets, and narrator Helen Moulder.

1. \* What were your aims for Dress - how did you approach writing music and performing? What did you want to do - or avoid - with the music you were making? There's that great comment from Yuri about him being banned from "playing anything vaguely resembling rock music..."

So, yeah, after Stone Telling, Kristen asked me to play with her and Brian, then he left and Stuart dubbed us ‘Dress’.

Yuri came back from Bris Vegas and joined for the Fringe Festival gig. He was the new Brian.

Yuri was living in a tumbledown cottage in Karepa Street, Brooklyn, at times sharing with Donald Smith from Surface of the Earth and Marcel Bear (Empirical). Around the time Dress formed in ‘94, I went back to Victoria Uni to study Applied Linguistics and German Language. Kristen was studying Ancient Greek, Latin and German Language, teaching piano. So she and I were really concerned with the rhythms of language and making them an equal part of the sound mosaic. So they weren’t just riding on the top like with conventional songs but contrapuntal. All the parts – voices and instruments were meant to have equal weight, travel independently. An ambitious project, we really only pulled off with Mildred’s Thorts. We had bits of improvisation but getting the riffs all entwining majestically was our big aim. J.S Bach writes like that and was an inspiration. Also Kraftwerk, who as Kristen said, “were ‘notey’, not chordal. I had some vague idea with our plucking and plinky-plonky crisscrossing arpeggios, we could achieve a similar hypnotic propulsion. But definitely a horse drawn cart compared to their jet-propelled bullet train.

And yes Yuri was banned from playing anything sounding “rock like”, or bluesy, any noodling when we paused. Sometimes I would kick him if he rebelled, which was quite draconian. Songs won in the end when we morphed into Entlang, more fun to play. We ended up with the name Entlang from the German, meaning ‘along, alongside’, fascinated that it was almost English. A friend in Sydney once joked if we’d called ourselves Entland we would have been huge. Yuri got bossed around in Dress, but kept on writing his own lovely songs, notably ‘Chinese Bangles’ and ‘Walking into Bars’ from that period, playing them with Kristen first, then in Entlang.

At that time all the hipsters were reading ‘A Thousand Plateaus’ by Deleuze & Guattari, or said they did. “Everybody who was anybody” as Gertrude Stein opined. The theory on rhizomes was like a metaphor for the structure of the emerging internet. Yuri actually read the huge tome, he was partial to conceptual works. We thought of our music as “tangly roots” in the context of all that new culture.

In those days, we went to lots of dance parties. There were new international DJs hitting the town every week. Kristen and I used to laugh at the boastful fliers, each one more God-like than the other. The ceilings would drip from human sweat in the cave-like spaces. I thought the German DJs were great, really in the Kraftwerk tradition of carefully defined vertical composition. I can’t recall any names! That influence went into the mix too, though you wouldn’t think it, morphing patterns. We wanted to sound like them but it was kind of impossible with our instruments.

I had a lecturer at uni, the poet Vincent O’ Sullivan, who said there was a theory music was the most abstract of art forms and tended to predict or predate other art movements by decades, even scientific developments. Looking back now, all I can think is the electronic dance party music then visually depicted algorithms… Now daily life is fissured with them.

We had no big plans/aims other than to record a “Geraldine” as we colloquially called them. The lathe cut polycarbonate records invented by South Islander Peter King. Hence the Dress 10-inch. Surface of the Earth turned us on to them. Rumours swirled that King had been visited by the CIA, worried that his apple juice-fueled car could disrupt the entire international oil industry.

3.How do you feel you, Kristen and Yuri interacted, musically, in Dress? How did your personalities and playing affect each other?

Me and Kristen tended to be more perfectionist and uptight, Yuri was more relaxed, so that was a good counterbalance. I was relieved they were both so technically adept, Kristen has such an amazing touch, imagination, so does Yuri. I’m more of an ideas person.

4. Can you tell me about each of the tracks on the Dress 10"?

Mildred’s Thorts

Is basically Gertude Stein’s poem of the same name set to music, recorded on 4-track in Kilbirnie at Kristen’s house.

There was an anthology of her poetry at Island Bay, I think it was our flatmate Richard Sedger’s (The And Band). The repetitive droning language that just went round in circles, elliptically, with a really loose attitude, not haughty in tone and really suited our riffing. I also had a tape of her reading in a calm and warm Boston accent, with a feeling of sunlight that kind of transferred to the recording, just the humour. A total modernist. We would have jammed the parts then decided when to repeat them.

Somer was another 4-track venture, written in about 20 minutes in a Kelburn house right next to the Botanical Gardens where the University’s Vice Chancellor lived and which Yuri was house sitting. I pounced on the cello there, thinking “Yay, I don’t have to hold this up, so easy to stay in tune”. Oscar speech: I’d like to thank medieval poet Anonymous for the beautiful wordage out of my ENGL 224 Middle English coursebook – raw and slangy. The song reminds me of the Wellington summer - short and gone before you know it. We didn’t bother to tidy it up much, left the lyrics fragmented. It was highly arranged, “We need a solo here!” Hence Yuri pumped out the only real piece of noise on the record, with his snaggy guitar tones. Yuri actually played the main piano riff on Somer. Kristen added the piano chords in the instrumental bridges. I call it “funky medieval.”

For a fertile period, everywhere there was a piano, we made a ‘song’ or piece, taped it.

We weren’t very good at labelling them. That’s where most of the good stuff is, buried like under sea treasure.

Brown Holland. Another Kilbirnie jam captured on Kristen’s tape recorder. An excerpt from a longer improv piece, whose start and middle weren’t interesting enough to include. Brian on sax. The title had nothing to do with anything.

Seven. From one of our three nights at Taki Rua, onto Stuart’s Tascam, a state-of-the-art field recorder. We had tried to compose the third section in 7/4 time, each bar including seven beats**,** but it morphed into 3/6. Couldn’t be tamed. But the ‘seven’ remained in the name.

5. Dress appear in Sally Rodwell's *Heaven's Cloudy Smile* film, which was released in 1998?

What are your memories of making the film, and what part did Dress play in it?

My big silk dress! Shooting around Wellington, the fun of concocting costumes. In the end, we only appeared in one scene as the dance band. It comprised folky dramatic interludes acted out by members of the Victoria University Russian Club, juxtaposed with Alan Brunton and Michelle Leggot reading their poems.

Sally had directed and adapted The Russian club’s annual production, The Master and Margarita, by Mikhail Bulghakov, earlier that year, with Dress performing our score live in the orchestra pit. Stuart joined us on bass and sax. I played a violin to symbolize the Devil. Feeling unobserved loosened us up, that and having a story to focus on. It was some of our best playing, nice and fiery.

I think we used some of those tunes for the Heaven’s Cloudy Smile soundtrack.

6. How often did Dress perform live? I recall shows at What Is Music... in Australia, but I'd imagine all the other shows were in NZ - how often did you play, and where?

Maybe monthly at the most. Often with Surface of the Earth, Fever Hospital, and Donald Smith’s solo outing, Lucky Stars. Thistle Hall was a favourite venue, old and wooden, with good acoustics. We got a great almost harsh electric sound there once with Stuart Porter on a portable mixing desk. Never to be repeated. Miking up the acoustic piano and viola often failed and resulted in rinky dinkiness.

In ’96, we went on a tour of the South Island – Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin, and got thoroughly sick of improv, so half the set was Entlang.

During the Fringe Festival, with Gerard Crewdson on vocals and percussion, we did a “gypsy walk” from Wellington Town Hall along the harbour to Freyberg Pool at Oriental Bay. Just free playing. We forgot to publicise it and no-one came. Yuri’s sister Anya turned up at the end in her car and gave us lifts home. And blintzes.

One memorable gig was at the partially empty Wellington Museum – under renovation. It was amazing to hear our sound ricocheting over every inch of the massive stone building.

There were quite a few live pieces that got recorded on 16-track but never released. They just didn’t have the right spirit. Mrs Th-y, another Gertrude Stein number, Todesfuge with lyrics by the Romanian/Jewish WW2 labour camp survivor Paul Celan. “Black milk of day break, we drink you at night”. A very famous poem in Europe. Bartokian Tahir, Droney.

It was cold and rained a lot, but we had late-night cafes. I spent most of my money on cake.

In 1997, we kicked off our set at What Is Music in Sydney at the Harbourside Brasserie, to our backing tape for Mrs Th-Y. It was a warped, warbling version of the main riff and the machine promptly ate it. Hilarious. The whole gig was blighted. Me and Kristen specified our sound in strong New Zealandese and, the engineers walked off mid-sentence. Rob Lundon from Pit Viper and Rosy Parlane from Thela had to translate. Was it misogyny? I can’t decide. But it was awesome traveling in a big gang with all our buddies, Marcel Bear of Empirical included.

7. How long were Dress together for, and why did the group disband?

1994-1998, so almost four years. The last thing we did was The Heaven’s Cloudy Smile soundtrack.

I moved to Sydney, followed by Yuri six months later. Torben was there studying sculpture at SCA so it was chain migration, really. We just disintegrated as bands do. Kristen moved to Auckland.

New Zealand was going through one of its periodic economic depressions. If you weren’t a professional, wages were so low. My job shelving at the uni library paid $8.40 an hour. The same job in Australia was $22.50. And the weather was so clement….