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Protégé

Ben Frost

“ I want things to get uncomfortable and dangerous and I want to push my work into scary new places.”

2010/2011

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## [Brian Eno](#)

More about the mentor

## **First Impressions**

An interview with Ben Frost on 18 June 2010, before the beginning of his mentoring year with Brian Eno.

## **At what age did you start playing an instrument?**

I was at the piano from very early on, I suppose around 6 or 7. It was my younger brother Luke who started playing it first and I remember going with my mother to pick him up from a class and being really fascinated. I immediately made it very clear to my mother then and there I wanted to play. From there on music, or rather the performance of music, very quickly became a sort of mode of transportation, not escape exactly, but perhaps more a more meditative thing, it was a way of getting lost in my head and turning off my brain which even today is still a problem and I still have that connection, especially with the piano. I can literally lose hours in front of a piano in this kind of visceral dialogue with it.

## **Does most of your music begin on the piano?**

There are no particular rules, but certainly more often than not I gravitate towards the piano or the guitar. The beginnings of my albums are usually drawn from snapshots on little tape recorders or more recently, my phone, when I'm in someone's house and they have a piano. In the old days I would sometimes even call in my ideas home to the answering machine.

I was schooled first and foremost as a visual artist, I went to art school and it has only become evident to me in the last few years just how strongly I am still geared towards working like a painter, how much I was affected by those methods of working. I research my work like a painter, I keep "sketchbooks" and the way in which I draw on ideas is very visually oriented. I see things like colour and texture and shape long before I imagine instrumentation or tempo or arrangement.

## **You have already made an international name for yourself, and you just turned 30. How did you do this?**

It always confuses me when I hear artists talking about their work in altruistic terms, and saying that it's made for other people. I think first and foremost I would differentiate myself there – my music is an entirely selfish pursuit – as soon as you start to consider your audience you end up cheating them. I have for the most part made uncompromised creative choices and I suppose I just keep trying to do that. Gut instinct has never steered me wrong.

## **How much of your time do you spend touring and giving performances?**

A huge part of my year has been sacrificed to airport departure lounges and tour buses because I released an album only last November. I enjoy the shows, but I hope there will be less of it next year so I can focus better on new work and collaborating with Brian.

## **Where were you when you heard that you had been chosen as the music protégé?**

I think I was in Spain actually, on tour.

Meeting Brian for the first time was funny, in that we spent the whole day talking and very little of it had anything to do with music - in that sense it was very natural. The only unnatural moment was at the end when I had to walk away and put it out of my mind, but then, I walked away thinking: "Well, I got some serious face time with someone who has affected my work and music generally in a totally profound way and it was great fun," and then I let it go. To be told a month later on tour he wanted to work with me as the protégé was a really nice, albeit strange, moment and it definitely took some time to rewire to this being a reality.

## **What do you hope to get most from the mentoring year?**

I am really trying not to go in with preconceived ideas about how this will work. I mean nothing would make me happier than to be able to look back to this point in a year's time and say: "How the hell did I end up here?" Eno, the producer, and the conduit for new music is something I have always wanted to experience as an artist, and obviously I am excited about his insights into my work on that level, but it's not so much the ideas but the processes that lead to them that make this really exciting to me. His studio, it doesn't feel like a music studio, it feels more like a factory for ideas, it seems to me he could just as easily be making furniture in there as music, and that is just fine with me.

## **What are the attractions of Iceland?**

This country has changed dramatically in the time I have been here. All of the banking and political turmoil is really just the start of it. I have certainly lived through some interesting times. My reasons for still being here have become much clearer to me largely because everything around me has changed. When you're cancelling shows and washing volcano ash off your house, you start to really reassess the reasons for staying in Iceland. It comes down to this though: I know everyone on my street, my water and my air are clean, I can drive 10 minutes from my studio and be fishing for salmon, which I do a lot, I grow vegetables in my garden, and 30 minutes in any direction I can be completely alone in nature. Maybe it's my reaction to this digital existence we are all getting sucked into, but I just need more and more to balance it out with something altogether more visceral and rooted in the dirt.

## **Do you know Lee Serle, who, like you, is from Melbourne, and has been chosen as the dance protégé?**

We worked together on *Mortal Engine* [a production by Chunky Move, a Melbourne dance company]. That was a really intense project and we spent a lot of time together. I'm not in the least surprised he was chosen [as dance protégé], he is incredible.

## **Why do you make music?**

I wouldn't know what to do with myself otherwise. I'm constantly making something new because I have to.

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