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John Vogel has worked at Penn for 8 years. He was briefly in the Psych department and then at Wharton, but for the bulk of that time he’s worked as a part-time annotator for the Linguistic Data Consortium. He’s also a member of the Philadelphia-based band Grandchildren, and a very frequent user of the Media Lab for his solo work.

Q: What do you work on in the lab?

John Vogel: Almost everything I do comes through the lab at some point. I mostly do solo projects—mostly interviews—under my own name, that are on my Vimeo page, but I’m also working on a separate project under the name ‘Eddie Sids’.

Battling Green Eye Shades was the last big video project I did. And then after I finished with that I started up these other 2 projects. One is called douthoux, and the other is White Zinfandel.

Everything on douthoux is electronic. And everything on White Zinfandel is supposed to be more natural. It’s all written on piano first and then overdubbed with trumpet. I’ve been teaching myself flute and clarinet to overdub on that, and then electronic space sounds on top of that. And I’m working on both of those at the same time.

In addition to that, lately I’ve been cutting up the interviews I’ve been doing, because they have similar questions throughout them, and I’m making an edited version where they line up in certain places, and I’m writing electronic music for that. Over the last 2 months that’s grown from not doing anything with it to having 45 minutes of material so far, and it’ll probably be between an hour and 1:20 when it’s done.
Q: And this is a personal project?

JV: This is all just for… fun. (laughter)

Q: What software and hardware do you use in the lab?

JV: I use Final Cut for all the video editing. Everything I do I have also taken the audio into Audacity here in the lab and mixed and compressed and amplified–just to brush it up, cut the ends off, and arrange it for tracking. And I use Garage Band for all the douthoux sampling.

Q: Where does the name douthoux come from?

JV: It was a random password that I don’t use anymore, but I don’t know, it just sounded like a European techno album to me. (laughs) So that was the idea going into it. I recorded my friends saying all the same utterances. Everything is grouped by theme, and I’m taking those themes and they represent the title of the track. And then for me, it’s mixing the lines into a format where it sounds more like a conversation instead of excerpted lines, and then also cutting in usually standup comedy or TV or movies into that, and making something that has a narrative flow for each individual track and kind of explores the same theme throughout.

The video I’m working on now is for the 3rd track off of that. I did that as part of a live performance I did recently, and also 2 tracks off of White Zinfandel. I had 2 tvs running of my friends reading into the camera, and I edited all of that here, and my goal was to line them up, and now I’m trying to make them interesting and put them in a useful format. It will go on Vimeo as a stand-alone work, so it’s not really intended as an accompaniment for the live performance.

Q: Where did you learn to do all the video/audio editing? Did you take classes? Did you teach yourself?

JV: I mostly taught myself. I also took some digital music classes in college at Penn State. We used a program called Digital Performer, which doesn’t really get used anymore. Jesse and Sarah actually helped me a LOT here in the lab with the Final Cut Pro stuff. It would be the type of thing where I was working on a project where I’d sit down and really try to do something myself, and then I’d come to a spot where I didn’t know how to do some technical thing, and they would show me, and that would really help me. I could go by myself for a little while, and then hit a spot where I wanted to do this one thing that I knew should be possible, but I didn’t know how to do it, and getting help from the lab staff when I’d get stuck.
All of the music on Battling Green Eye Shades I did at the Music Technology Lab here at Penn in the music building my first couple years out of college. At the end of that, I wanted to do a video, and they sent me here to the Vitale Digital Media Lab.

Q: We’re glad they did! What’s your favorite part about the lab?

JV: The software is great. It’s so good to have that resource, because all of the software is ridiculously expensive. If you try to get the kind of machines and software you have here at home, that’s just ridiculous amounts of money that I don’t have. (laughs) So just the availability of all of that stuff. The equipment lending has also been a big thing. I didn’t even get into that until maybe a year after coming here pretty regularly. Just getting the cameras and the Zoom audio recorders has really helped with the interviewing that I’ve been doing. And the atmosphere and staff is just really helpful and cool. Yeah. It’s just a good place to come.

Q: You’ve interviewed a bunch of bands and authors for Skyscraper Magazine and Beyond Race Magazine. How did that happen? How did you get connected to the bands and to the magazines?

JV: I’m actually the Fiction Books Editor for Skyscraper after just being a contributor for a few years, I was the Books and DVDs editor for Rockpile magazine here in Philly. I got started with them back in 2004 or 5, and I was with them until they crumbled due to financial problems. And about the same time, Skyscraper went from print to full digital online. When they launched their website they were looking for editors. I thought, I hadn’t reviewed books and DVDs for a while, and it was something I really wanted to get back into, so they hired me for that.

I started doing the band interviews as personal projects before Skyscraper was up and running, so I was still in this middle ground where I didn’t have anyone solid to publish for anymore. I tried to do the freelance thing, and decided I really didn’t like the runaround of pitching articles. So I figured I’d do a project on my own collecting interviews. I already do interviews as part of my job at the LDC, interviewing people in microphoned situations daily, talking to people for 15-20 minutes at a time, and just keeping them talking is the only task. So you learn a certain amount of skill with coaxing conversation out of people. I wanted to apply that to something I really liked, and with people I really wanted to talk to. So I started sending out emails with this idea of just picking people’s brains about the creative process, and I got a TON of rejections. And then just when I’d gotten to the point where I’d almost decided maybe this wasn’t such a good idea, I got a response from Matmos saying they wanted to do it, and that really gave me hope and I just kept doing it. And it’s continued right on up until now.
Q: Thanks for talking with me.

JV: No problem.

The live performance John mentioned in the interview consisted of two tracks each from his *douthoux* and *Battling Green Eye Shades* projects. They are: *Technology, Personal, Glass One*, and *Glass Two*.

**Links:**


*Battling Green Eye Shades on YouTube:*

[http://www.youtube.com/user/battlinggreen#p/a/u/1/ZYyKlUBmzlQ](http://www.youtube.com/user/battlinggreen#p/a/u/1/ZYyKlUBmzlQ)