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Lucas Abela
Glass, Radio, Tape Decks, Turntables
Birthplace: Melbourne, VIC

SELECT DISCOGRAPHY.

Justice Yeldham / Dave Phillips
Two Thousand-Five (Split LP, Blossoming Noise, 2010)

Rice Corpse
Mrs Rice (CD, SubJam, 2009)

Justice Yeldham
Birthday (LP, Anarchymoon, 2008)
Cicatrix (CD, Sweatlung, 2007)
Live in School (7", Load, 2007)
Live in Beirut (7", Chondritic Sound, 2005)

DJ Smallcock
Yinyue (CD, dualpLOVER, 2000)

A Kombi
Music to Drive-by (CD, dualpLOVER, 1996)

Curated Pages:
Lucas Abela, Artefact from Auraltered State #4, 05/06/2010

Geniuses often come in unlikely forms. Sometimes mistaken for a homeless man or my grandpa, Lucas Abela is no exception. Starting a record label whilst living in his van, hosting Happy New Financial Year parties, putting on weekly live shows in a mouldy basement of a Spanish club, organising drive-in parties, turning his Kombi van into an instrument, starting DIY venues, organising gigs in sex clubs, recording impromptu Peel Sessions with The Flaming Lips, fighting nude, amplified sword fights, creating vinyl racetrack installations, and travelling over 40 countries to play countless shows, he has been a whirlwind of activity in dirty ole Sydney town since the 1990s. It's hard to even scratch the surface of the many (scarred) faces of Lucas Abela/Justice Yeldham/Peeled Hearts Paste/DJ Smallcock. Colloquially known as "the glass guy," Lucas is a man of many monikers and a celebrity in his own right.



KEG DE SOUZA: You recently posted a copy of your first school report on your website. Not to rub it in, but you did pretty badly and apparently had an evident "lack of concentration."

LUCAS ABELA: I didn't improve much either and was forced to repeat year two — sounds ridiculous, like I failed finger painting and blocks or something! Imagine being two years into it and you're already watching the friends you made advance onto year three! And then there's the fact that they put me into a special class for slow kids. It was an amazing way to induce a stupidity complex for the rest of my schooling and beyond.

KDS: Your teacher made one positive remark, noting that your "artwork is delightful and reflects original thinking." Have you always been considered artistic?

LA: I don't really remember my primary school art. Mum says that the principal wanted to exhibit some of my work in his office for a year after I finished year three. When the year was finished, she went to retrieve the work, but it had mysteriously vanished. My mum still thinks they stole it.

KDS: What is your earliest memory?

LA: Aged two, being laid down on a floral yellow pillow on the side of the pacific highway, bleeding.

KDS: What happened?

LA: Not exactly sure. Mum swears she got cut off or something, but basically she rolled the family Range Rover, like, seven times. By the time it came to a rest, only my brother Simon and my Nana Barker were still left in the car. The rest of us had been thrown out through the windscreen and were strewn all over the road.

KDS: Now, you know I have this theory that this hurling through the glass windscreen was a crucial moment that has shaped your current art practice. Do you think there's any truth in this?

LA: Well, if you think smashing sheets of glass across my head is a comfort thing, I guess you maybe right in some perverse way. It is a comfort to me. Performing is an absolute pleasure and I would be lying if I said I didn't enjoy bleeding. As a child, blood fascinated me; whenever I broke skin, I wouldn't sook. Rather, I would enjoy watching it flow, and I always enjoyed the taste.

KDS: So you're a masochist, then?

LA: No. Well, yes, what I described above sounds like someone who derives pleasure from bleeding, but it's hardly masochism. I don't cut myself for pleasure.

KDS: *Umm, really?*

LA: In a way, you're right. I do derive pleasure from my performances. But I don't always bleed in my performances and still retain the pleasure aspect, so it isn't the bloodletting that makes it pleasurable. Also, a masochist enjoys pain, whereas in my show my mind is in such a state that I don't actually feel pain and barely notice it when I've cut myself.

KDS: *What kind of a state?*

LA: With fear of sounding like a hippie, I can only describe it like some sort of transcendental ecstasism, like walking on hot coals or something. Now, I'm not claiming that I always reach this state during a show, but usually, if I'm not distracted, there is something about the music and action that easily triggers it.

KDS: *You feel no pain at all?*

LA: Not exactly. Sometimes I can feel the cutting, like on my lips, but the sensation is removed from pain as I would normally experience it. Say, a more severe cut like this scar on my right wrist I endured in Tenerife. I was playing a heavy thick sheet, which suddenly cracked and spilt mid-performance and fell onto my wrist. I felt the impact and the weight of the glass on my wrist but not the pain. As I played, the sensation of the wound opening up and the liquid gushing down my arm was obvious, but there was no associated pain; it was these aspects that made me realise I had done myself a mischief that probably needed tending.

KDS: *What did you do?*

LA: I brought my show to climax and went to inspect the damage.

KDS: *How was it?*

LA: Deep, through the skin, skin spread out like a little mouth, enough to see what I believe was an exposed nerve.

KDS: *Did you get stitches?*

LA: No time. I had a gig in London the next evening and had a very early flight. So I poured vodka over it — which I started putting on my rider for this very purpose. Now, although after the show I'm still somewhat high, sensations like pain do start to come back and pouring vodka over an exposed nerve was indeed painful.

KDS: *What's the worst pain you've experienced?*

LA: I'm getting to that. Like I said, the next day I had to be in London, so I didn't have time to go to hospital and have it stitched up and the nerve tucked away. All I could do was wrap the wound in gauze, have a short sleep and get myself to the airport. By the time I was at the venue in London, my arm was in excruciating pain, and I knew I should clean and redress or it would get worse. So in the greenroom, I unwrapped the bandage, only to find that the exposed nerve had bonded to my dressings, causing unbearable pain every time I tried

to remove it. But the worst was yet to come. I tried using my vodka to soften the coagulated blood that had formed between me, my nerve and the bandage, causing them to fuse together, but no luck. All I could do was the sudden band-aid method you're taught as a child when it gets stuck to your hair or something — but this wasn't hair, it was my fucking nerve! So I grit my teeth, looked away and ripped it off; and, by God, I've never felt any pain like that before or after.

KDS: *Ew. Let's move on. What were you doing in Tenerife anyway?*

LA: Touring, as usual. I like to tour, especially in out of the way places like Tenerife. I don't see touring as a promotional exercise to promote an album, or even myself, or some such shit. To me, touring is my art form, each tour being a body of work. And for that reason, I like to go wherever I can. As long as someone is willing to book me, I'm there, playing every night if possible — I'd get bored otherwise. It doesn't come down to playing big cities, making money, or huge crowds. It's about momentum, place to place, people to people — this is how and when my music excels.

KDS: *You've been to some strange places, playing in cities like Beirut. Is there much interest in your music in these places?*

LA: Well, no. But that's not the point. Build it and they will come, they say. And they came. To be honest, I had better turnouts in Beirut than my first time in New York. And even when I'm in America I tend to frontier tour. Yes, I will do New York and Los Angeles, but at the same time I take great pains to find places to play off the beaten track. On my forthcoming US tour, I have gigs lined up in Lincoln, Nebraska, St Augustine, Florida, Savannah, Georgia, and Johnson City, Tennessee, amongst other places — which is where you'll find a different America that you won't experience in the huge metropolises.

KDS: *Back home, Rice Corpse just played with Lou Reed at the Vivid festival at the Opera House, and I missed it. How did it go?*

LA: It was a total shambles. I had prepared to debut the glass in stereo, and the Opera House staff couldn't even get me two working DIs. Although I could demonstrate that both my lines were in working order, my sound check was cut. I was eventually forced to play in mono and apparently I wasn't even fed into the front of house until half way through the set. But that's not the worst of it. Pete, the drummer in Rice Corpse, had two huge monitors behind him but neither was turned on, so he played the entire set deaf to Stuart and I. Un-fucking-believable! I was not prepared for such incompetence at our apparently premier venue!

KDS: *Sorry I asked. I'm also interested in how you started dualpLOVER in the '90s. With no money, living in your van, and at a time before CD-Rs and the everybody-is-a-label thing, how did you manage?*

LA: Well, living in the van certainly helped — money that would normally go to rent could be set aside for



releasing music. Besides the dole, I had some cash-in-hand work and simply did nothing, in order to save enough to release A Kombi's *Music to Drive-by*, which, ironically, were recordings of my van's music.

KDS: *How did Swerve become involved?*

LA: After the first release, I was adamant that I didn't want the label to be a vanity concern and decided to release my favorite band at the time, Alternahunk. Swerve was also a fan and asked if he could invest. Invest! How fucking funny does that sound now?

KDS: *Hilarious! He didn't make a return?*

LA: Fuck no, the label made nothing but a loss for years. I'm sure that if it wasn't for the manufacturing arm of

standard experimental radio kind of thing. One day, I thought that instead of playing a bunch of records and tapes over each other I could just as easily find random material by broadcasting other radio stations. So I brought in a radio and put my announcers mic to it and started broadcasting other stations over the 88.9 dial until the inevitable happened: I hit 88.9 and the radio station began to feedback in on itself in a gorgeous howl. It was a miraculous sound! So I jammed it most of the evening — you know, playing The Village People while adjusting the dial slightly or turning the announcers mic on and off. Then the phone rang, I answered and all I heard on the line was a terse, "Get off the air, small-



the business, it would still be making a loss. Swerve's "investment" ended up being in the form of tax returns as we hedged his waged life against my enterprise to the tune of about \$10K a year, sort of a backdoor arts grant.

KDS: *Most people would assume that the name "DJ Smallcock" was given to you because of the size of your endowment, but I know there's actually an even better story behind you being given this name. Can you retell it?*

LA: Now, that was some time ago. I was doing my radio show on RSR FM in Marrickville. My show was an audio montage kind of thing — I'd play as many mediums as I could and fuck with them; it was a

cock," and the line went dead. Normally, I never back-announced or talked during my shows, but the moment took me and I turned the radio down and simply said, "You're with DJ Smallcock on Radio Skid Row 88.9 FM"; and I've been Smallcock ever since.

KDS: *You still have the first record you ever bought, a 7" of Genghis Khan's Moscow, to which you taught yourself how to cossack. Would you consider this moment important to your future as a self-taught performer?*

LA: I think having this cossacking skill as a child was a precursor to what I'm doing now. I know I often used it when playing Simon Says, because I knew none of the other kids were capable of the movements involved,

and I'd always win. I think the same mentality applies to something like the glass, having a skill no one else has means that I can't be as easily compared to others and therefore can excel without trying as hard. Like it or not, I'm the best glass player in the world.

KDS: *At the moment, you're working on a huge vinyl race-track installation. Can you describe this a little, and do you think this is a natural evolution of where you're going in your work as you get older?*

LA: It's more of a devolution because I had this idea back in the '90s when I was doing more experimental, turntable stuff. Basically, at the time, it went into the "too hard," or more like, "too expensive," basket. It's ironic now, I suppose, that because I was poor I came up with a cheap instrument — ideas like discarded glass — which has become world renowned, and due to this recognition I'm able to get arts grants to build on ideas I had over a decade ago.

KDS: *You've also been found to curate an amazing series of gigs at Performance Space focusing on bands based in New South Wales called Auraltered State. What was the main impetus behind starting this?*

LA: I wanted to highlight that to experiment with music doesn't mean that you have to make the generic music that is usually associated with contemporary music in such venues; true innovation and experimentation can be found in all forms of music no matter the genre. So my focus has been to find differing artists who exemplify this notion. I also wanted to explore the local, mainly due to a jibe on the Sydney scene I had recently read in an interview with a Melbourne band that had the audacity to say, "Sydney is a soulless, uncreative city." I guess Auraltered State is my response to that.

KDS: *Besides a few one-off collaborations, you've had a long history of performing solo, but in 2008 you started your first band in China. Can you tell us about how this shift was for you — performing alone to the dynamic with other people?*

LA: I've always only ever enjoyed performing live in front of people; it's something about the energy of having others in the room that can make me do what I do. What the band did for me was replace the need for an audience, as now I have them to feed from. That alone was incredibly refreshing for me, and not only do I get energy from them, musically they push me in new directions I would never find myself in performing solo.

KDS: *You seem to be performing with Rice Corps more than as a solo act. Where is Justice Yeldham heading now?*

LA: Well, locally, yes, but the two tours I have coming up in the states and South America are both Yeldham outings. Hopefully, we can tour as a band one day, but being three people is so different to being just one and, like, Pete has kids and a bunch of other bands that make him better money. So it's hard to know when we'll get to travel as a band.

Yeldham, however, as I said, is going stereo. I'm now

using two mics. You can hear the difference as the sheet vibrates from one end of the glass to the other. I'm also starting a new phase, building glass instruments from scratch at Cydonia in Newtown, which should prove interesting.

KDS: *You are arguably the world's best glass player. I know that one of your pet hates is that some people don't take glass seriously as an instrument. What are your musings on this?*

LA: At one show in Sweden, I had two opposing reviews, one called me "a freak show without content," the other said "it was the most important music since the Sex Pistols." I don't believe either, I just want people to listen to me as a musician and try to forget the fact that I might be bleeding or whatever and just listen to what I'm doing aurally, how I'm manipulating a sheet of glass to get that range of sound. I'm not screaming, it's not all pedals. Vocally, it takes delicate, precise operations to do what I'm doing. Which I guess is the only pitfall in doing something unique: No one realises what exactly you're doing.

KDS: *You got to record a Peel Session with the Flaming Lips. Can you tell us the story?*

LA: I was doing a session for a BBC3 program called Mixing It, making a racket, when this fella with a beard pops in to complain. When he sees that the unthinkable sounds were being produced by one man with a turkey skewer shoved down his throat, he became excited and introduced himself as someone from The Flaming Lips who was doing a Peel Session next door and wondered if I might like to play on the record. Well, I didn't know who The Flaming Lips were but I sure as shit wanted to play on a Peel Session, and besides, there was an extra 50 quid in it. So they patched me in and I did a noise solo during an interlude on one of the tracks, which I've never heard. They did send me a Christmas card, though.

KDS: *You're a pretty avid and active Sydney supporter and resident. Do you think the fact that there is a struggle to make shit happen in Sydney makes you do more?*

LA: I just like Sydney. It's a well-rounded city and its musicians don't tend to take things as seriously as they do in Melbourne. Which, I guess, is the basic difference: Melbourne breeds careerists, while Sydney careerists move to Melbourne. And they can stay there for all I care. I don't need hundreds of venues and gigs every night to make me happy, and the fact that it is a struggle to get a show means that both the players and the audience will have a more special experience and not just another night at the Tote. On that note, what a bunch of whingers. You lost one venue, boo fucking hoo.

KDS: *Finally, I'm currently in Montreal and I've met people here who can't believe I know you. They want me to convince you to come play here. Will you?*

LA: No. I hate their border.