

TEDDY LASRY

FUNKY GHOST 1975 - 1987

Teddy Lasry's obsession with music and the discovery of new instruments and machines of all kinds remains insatiable to this day, and is very much a result of his musical upbringing and the long list of iconic musicians he came into contact with over the years. His vision seems endless in its capacity to explore, with his music speaking of both the beauty of refined musicality and the possibilities found within curiosity. Despite losing all of his eyesight at the age of 38, and the hearing in his left ear not long after, Teddy keeps on making music via ingenious methods, along with continuing to take music lessons that help to further refine his already profound musical knowledge. To really understand Teddy's sound and the values he holds dear, we have to take a dive into the Lasry family history, and this incredible story begins in the city of Algiers...

Jacques Lasry, Teddy's father, was born in Algiers in 1918. Jacques' father, Albert was the son of Jewish immigrants from Spain and produced confectioner uniforms for the French Army, whilst his mother Juliette was originally from Algiers.

Jacques' father was enlisted to fight in the First World War, during which he was badly

poisoned and returned from the conflict with a serious illness. On his deathbed a few years later in 1934, he would ask Jacques what he planned to do with his life. Jacques, who was a member of the Algiers Conservatoire and an accomplished piano player, told him he wished to pursue his passion and play music professionally. Albert would promptly state "that isn't a job", to which Jacques replied



"What if I became Schubert?". Astounded, yet reassured, his father gave him his blessing.

After receiving a war pension due to Albert's passing, Juliette moved to Paris with Jacques who began studying at l'École Normale, along with looking for ways to gain a place at the local conservatoire. He would then meet Marguerite Long, a renowned French pianist and teacher at the Conservatoire, who subsequently helped Jacques get a role as an auditor at the school. At the Conservatoire, Jacques became friends with Samson Francois, whilst also meeting a young catholic girl named Yvonne, the daughter of a German teacher who played the organ at Sunday Mass. Jacques and Yvonne subsequently fell in love and moved in with Yvonne's parents in La Varenne Saint Hilaire.

local farmers in return for food and shelter, Jacques and Yvonne made it safely to Algiers, where they would live until the end of the war. Jacques would regail Teddy with this story on a number of occasions, who was always amazed by his father's talents as a storyteller.

During the war, Jacques and Yvonne would have two children; Claude in 1942, and France-Claire in 1945. Teddy's brother Stany was born a few years later in 1954, becoming an accomplished musician from the age of 6. After the liberation and their subsequent return to Paris, they were able to reclaim Juliette's flat on Avenue des Ternes, which had become an illegal squat during the occupation.

Following the family's relocation, Jacques would find some paid work as a musician in small cafés and music venues, along with some seasonal work in the South of France. This was where Jacques discovered the thriving Jazz scene in the City of Nice, along with discovering the music of Teddy Wilson (whom he admired so much he would name his son after him) and becoming acquainted



When the Germans invaded France in 1940, Jacques immediately sent his mother back to Algiers, whilst hatching an escape plan for himself and Yvonne. The couple left for Port-Vendres on bicycle (with Jacques sporting a tuxedo and trousers cut to resemble shorts), with the plan being to get a boat to Algeria from there. After exchanging help with

with Francis Claude, who owned the Parisien Cabaret bar Milord l'arsouille (where up-and-comers such as Léo Ferré, Jacques Brel and Boris Vian would perform). The Milord was notable not only for its musical performances, but that it was where "La Marseillaise", the French National Anthem, was performed for the first time in 1792.

Francis subsequently hired Jacques to play the piano at the venue, where he would perform alongside singer Michèle Arnaud. The duo were joined on stage by a young guitar player called Lucien Ginsburg, who performed under the name Serge Gainsbourg and who was personally recommended by Jacques, with the two sharing a firm friendship.

During his time at the Milord, Jacques met and bonded with Félix Barrel (also known professionally as François Baschet), who was the son of the founder of French magazine *Illustration*. Jacques was transfixed by the inflatable guitar that Barrel designed for performances, and it was this interest that led to Barrel showing Jacques another invention of his, an early prototype of the crystal organ instrument. Yvonne would later join Jacques, François and his brother Bernard for performances, where she would play the crystal organ, with the group later being known as Les Structures Sonores.



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with the culmination of these events leading to his explosion after calling his gym teacher a 'jerk' during an argument. He subsequently moved in with his grandmother for a year.

Despite his struggles at school, Teddy devoted himself to music, with the piano becoming his instrument of choice, a passion that was only strengthened after being woken up by his father playing a Boogie woogie tune on the piano. After a passing interest in the guitar, he was introduced to the alto saxophone by his best friend Jean-Michel Hervé. Mesmerised, Teddy ran home to announce to his father that he wanted to learn the instrument. Jacques would immediately call Roger Simon, who advised Teddy to learn the clarinet instead, due to its complexity allowing for an easy transition into playing the saxophone or the flute.

During this time, Jacques hosted a weekly radio show on Paris Inter (formerly France Inter) which focused on up and coming singers, with Francis Claude acting as the show's producer. Teddy would often attend the show, and this was where he got to experience a studio environment for the first time. The shows would appeal very much to Teddy's musical senses, such as the smells of machines and mono tape recorders, and the sounds resonating from accordions, basses and a selection of percussive props (the props would later inspire Teddy to buy a vibraphone).

Prior to a Les Structures Sonores rehearsal, Teddy was invited along to play a Blues number on the clarinet for the group. Enthused by his performance, the band offered him to

join them for a concert held at Paris' L'école Alsacienne. During the early 1960s, the repertoire of Les Structures Sonores was quite eclectic, with the band performing compositions by Jacques, transcriptions of Bartók's "Duetti", Bach's "Inventions for Two Voices", a number of Vivaldi's works, and other improvisations. Teddy's performances in particular were well received by audiences, who loved his interpretation of the Blues.

Teddy would then embark on a US tour with the group, with highlights including performances at the Seattle World Fair and on the Ed Sullivan Show. Teddy was amazed by his first experience overseas, with particularly strong memories of the toasters, refrigerators and enormous cars. During the same time period, they appeared in several prestigious press outlets, including Life magazine, Le Figaro, the BBC, the New York Times and the New Scientist. In 1959, they were asked by Jean Cocteau to provide the music for his film, *The Testament of Orpheus* (1960) – the first of many soundtracks on which the unique Baschet sounds would feature.

Back in France, Teddy's tutors at the Versailles Conservatoire were captivated by his natural intuitiveness and musical intelligence, and encouraged him to express himself via less traditional channels. He would subsequently meet the renowned flutist Roger Bourdin, who famously improvised on Jacques Dutronc's "Paris s'éveille" and would teach Teddy the instrument and help to foster a connection with it that would last throughout his recording career. Teddy would graduate in the summer of 1967.

During the summer of the same year, Jacques recorded a demo for a show called *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*, which was run by Ariane Mnouchkine and her troupe, le Théâtre du Soleil. Ariane was impressed with a flute solo that Teddy performed, which led to an invitation to join the troupe. With his new role came financial independence, and Teddy immersed himself in city life, politics and culture. 1968 was an important year for the troupe, as they unveiled the innovative *Le Songe...* at the Bouglione circus to great applause, followed by performances at various factories on strike, to coincide with the May 68 demonstrations. During the summer, further rehearsals and improvisations would lead to the creation of *Les Clowns*, which was first performed at the end of 1969. Teddy was given a more composer orientated role in this production, directing members of the troupe whilst playing alto saxophone and piano. The troupe would return to Paris following their successful tour, and move into l'Elysée Montmartre, a former wrestling venue.



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As 1969 moved on, he grew tired of the repetitive nature of the troupe's performances and the technical limitations of the repertoire. Around this time, Teddy and his quartet were offered a rehearsal space by Ariane in the commune of Chatou on the outskirts of Paris, with the home being provided by Ariane's father, film producer Alexandre Mnouchkine. Jacques Vidal, the quartet's double bass player, informed Teddy about a group whose rhythm section was in place but was without a brass section, which led to a meeting with the group's pianist, François "Faton" Cahen. Faton was impressed by Teddy's playing and invited him to perform to the leader of the band, Christian Vander, who was equally impressed with his performance. And thus, the trio of musicians along with Claude Engel, Laurent Thibaut and Francis Moze, would form the initial foundations of the progressive Jazz rock band Magma.



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Teddy was born in Nice in 1947, and some of his earliest memories are of accompanying his father at the piano, with the two playing and singing songs by Mouloudj and Ferre.

A good student at primary school, Teddy later attended the Collège Lycée Pasteur, but due to being diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, he would begin to face difficulties. Forced to sit in the front row to see the board during classes, Teddy was bullied by certain students and as a result he started acting out,



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Based in the Chevreuse valley, the group rehearsed everyday from 10am to 6pm for six months, working on the songs that would make up their debut album, *Magma / Kobaïa*, which was released in 1970.

Teddy always appreciated Christian's abilities as a singer and the wider talents of the group, but by the time they were working on their third album, 1973's *Mekanik Destruktiv Kommandöh*, he had become uninspired with the direction that Magma was taking, and informed Christian of his intention to leave. Despite this, Teddy would still contribute to the record, playing trumpet, trombone and saxophone on a number of tracks. Teddy would later decline to perform at the 1973 Newport Music Festival with the band, as he wanted to honour Shabbat. Even though he had grown disillusioned with Magma's musical direction, Teddy was profoundly influenced by the group during his career, and still maintains contact with a number of former members.

Teddy's transition into his solo career came with contrasting fortunes, in that he was now able to explore the idea of blending music and images - and do so with all the creative freedom he could wish for - but with the unfortunate realisation that his eyesight was gradually worsening. This movement into exploring how music and images were merged together was largely a result of his father's influence, whose work with Les Structures Sonores was often used on television due to its futuristic tone.

After being introduced to Claude Miller by Le Théâtre du Soleil collaborator Philippe Léotard, Teddy would compose the music for Miller's short film *Camille ou la comédie catastrophique*. Recorded at Pierre Barouh's Saravah Studios, the soundtrack would feature Jean-Charles Capon on cello, former Magma bandmate Yochk'o Seffer on flute and Léo Petit on bass. Miller was highly encouraged by Teddy's work, and was keen to work with him on a new project, but Teddy panicked, meaning that the project never got off the ground.

In 1975, Teddy had set up a home studio in his apartment on Rue de la Victoire, and began working on his next record. On a 4-track console he started recording drum sequences on a monophonic ARP synthesiser, along with using a clavinet and a synthesiser, and once

he had finalised the tracks, they were merged into two tracks and mixed via the mic inputs, thus freeing two tracks for additional recordings. This process would be repeated again, leading to 8 tracks being recorded using a 4-track console. Teddy then approached a number of publishers via phone numbers found in *Le Guide Du Showbusiness*, with Robert Viger of Sonimage agreeing to meet him at the label's office in Boulogne. Teddy played him the compositions, of which Viger suggested adding new instruments, with Christian Lété invited to contribute drum parts. With the tracks finalised, the album *Action Printing* was released in 1975.

In the same year, he would meet Patchwork record label founder René Taquet, and this budding relationship would result in two records being released on the imprint. The first album was entitled *Tutti Fluti*, whilst the second, *Flutissimo*, a collaboration piece with Jean Cohen-Solal, arriving later in the year. Jean Schultheis would record the drum parts for four tracks on *Tutti Fluti*, including the track "Los Angeles", with Jannick Top contributing bass.

In 1976, Teddy was approached by music publisher Robert Viger to produce the soundtrack for a pornographic movie that he was working on. Teddy watched the movie, and was both shocked and intrigued by it, with the experience leading to the composition of the track "Blue Theme", an epic electronic jazz odyssey that was also heavily inspired by Miles Davis' cut "All Blues". Teddy utilised a clavinet, synthesised basslines and flute improvisations to create its unique melodic grooves. Rather than work on the soundtrack to Viger's film, the song would go on to form the cornerstone of the *Escalade* record, the first of three albums recorded in 1976. Teddy would then work alongside composer Claude Perraudin on the album *Racing*, with the



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A and B sides split between the two musicians. Teddy recorded three sequences of clavinet for the track "Chamonix" from that record, which he took to Studio Davout in order to include contributions from André Ceccarelli, Tony Bonfils and Jean-Claude Chavanat.

Teddy would also begin performing clarinet alongside Yiddish singer Ben Zimet around this time. The duo were joined by accordionist Eddy Schaff and violinist Maurice Delaistier, with the band's repertoire consisting of works by Ravel and Sati.

Due to his natural musical curiosity and his experiences with Les Structures Sonores, Teddy has maintained a lifelong affinity with exploring the possibilities of musical instruments, with synthesisers emerging as one of his biggest passions in this regard. This passion came to the fore after spending a 7,000 francs loan on an ARP Odyssey (with the loan meant to be spent on fixing the roof of his house), along with purchasing several Roland models, a Prophet T8 and some Oberheim drum machines over the years.

The result of these acquisitions would be a number of compositions that were noticeably more ambient and grand in scale than his previous Jazz-Funk focused pieces. Faton Cahen, who had recently signed to RCA with his band Zao, convinced the label's A&R to listen to these new compositions, which led to the imprint agreeing to release Teddy's next record.

During the recording sessions, Teddy would work on the tracks that would make up the *E=Mc2* album, a cosmic-ambient leaning album that really demonstrated his abilities and his vision, along with utilising innovative recording techniques to conjure up textures and sounds. Teddy used decoys and recorders to recreate the sounds of birds for the opening segment of one of his masterpieces, "Birds of Space". He played the marimba in the song's second sequence, whilst also improvising on his pipe. Jannick Top was brought in to record the bass line and the piece ends with a Rhodes solo (the first part of which is written and the end improvised). Whilst Teddy was recording the Rhodes solo at the Davout studio, Romanian conductor Teodor Cosma attended the session and congratulated him on the track, to which Teddy was incredibly touched. Thinking there is something missing to open and close the record, Teddy went home and recorded on the Rhodes a piece entitled "Life", with two versions appearing at the beginning and end of the record. *E=MC²* was released in 1976, and remains one of the jewels of his discography.

In 1987, Teddy started working on *Back to Amazonia*, the final album recorded in his home studio at Rue de la Victoire. He recruited his nephew to play the trumpet on the album's opener, "Raising sun on Bali". Teddy would dust off the double bass lessons he undertook at the Versailles Conservatoire to record the bass line on the title track.

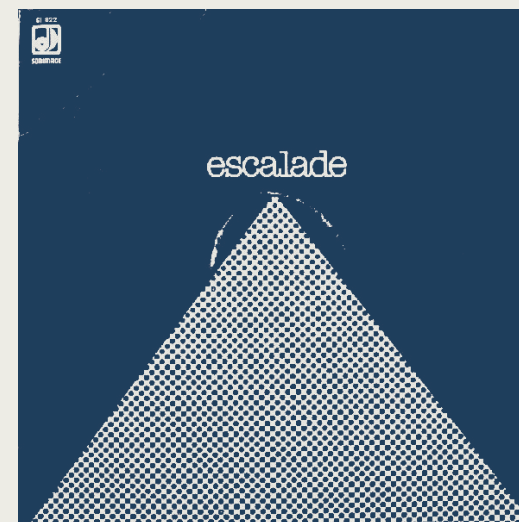
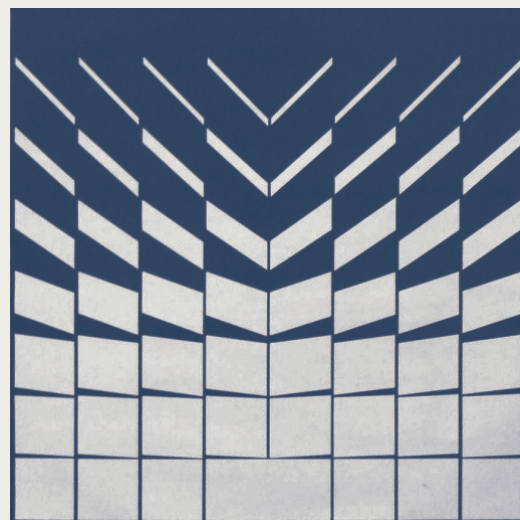
To his great regret, he ended up selling the instrument to Jean-François Jenny-Clark a few years later. *Back to Amazonia* is one of Teddy's favourite albums, and would be the last album of his featuring synthesizers.

One day, Teddy received a visit from an assistant to music publisher Frederic Leibovitz, the founder of Koka-Média and Cézame Music Agency, who asked him if he would be keen to work on an album that showcased his clavinet skills. Teddy then showed Leibovitz what he was working on at the time, with these compositions eventually making up the contents of the *Swing Nostalgia* album, which was recorded in 1987 and then re-released in 1992.

Since 1983, Teddy also accompanies singer Talila for whom he produced a couple of albums.

Teddy still resides in Paris, where he has lived his whole life. He continues to record and experiment with music, a passion which in many ways has never left his side, even at the age of 75, and probably never will. His life's work is a testament to always looking beyond and trusting your curiosity, to believing in your musical convictions and trusting that something good can arrive on the back of experimentation. From Jazz-Funk to Swing to Ambient to Electronica, Teddy Lasry has always been brilliant with whatever genre he decides to place himself within, and the fruits of his labours really do speak through time as audial masterclasses of musicality and vision. From playing the piano with his father as a young boy, to being a part of Les Structures Sonores and Magma, to laying down the chords that would make up the track "Life", Teddy's life and musical career has been truly extraordinary, and even after achieving so much, his curiosity and musical intuitiveness remain as strong as ever.

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Original records (from top to bottom, left to right):

- E=MC2 (RCA - 1976)
- Back to Amazonia (Sonimage - 1987)
- Escalade (Sonimage - 1976)
- Tutti Fluti (Patchwork - 1975) / Racing (Patchwork - 1976)
- Teddy Lasry and Co (Patchwork - 1983)
- Action Printing (Sonimage - 1975)

Captions:

- 1 Teddy in his flat Rue de la Victoire in the late 70's
- 2 François and Yvonne Lasry playing crystal organs in the early 60's
- 3 Les Structure Sonores (Photo taken in New York for Life magazine, 1962)
- 4 Teddy backstage for Les Clowns, 1970
- 5 Teddy playing percussion in the early 60's
- 6 Teddy in Magma, 1972
- 7 Family home with its broken roof (Puisaye region), date unknown

A1, A3, B1, B3: Under licence, courtesy of Kapagama
 A2, A4, B2, B4: Under licence, courtesy of Universal
 Production Music France
 Special thanks: Teddy Lasry, Samuel Lasry, Jeremy Lasry,
 JYH, Jean-Marie Béasse, Kit Bowen, Simon Goubert

