



[Tindersticks](#) at [Liverpool Philharmonic](#)

Reviewed by [Emma Short](#) October 2011

The formation of Music Beyond Mainstream in 2001, a consortium of 12 leading concert halls in the UK, has allowed major pieces of work in music to be seen by audiences throughout the country. By encouraging the touring of innovative folk, jazz, world, roots and left field music and initiating performances like their 36th project ***Tindersticks at the Liverpool Philharmonic***, music lovers nationwide are able to experience that which at one time would have only been accessible to audiences in London.

The Liverpool Philharmonic Hall managed to host a breathtaking utopia of visual and instrumental genius in the form of selected film clips cataloguing the 15 year relationship between Nottingham group **Tindersticks**, and French film maker **Claire Denis**. The performance was played out simultaneously in front of and upon the large screen on centre stage to an audience that became lost in its grasp. It has to be said from the outset that this collaboration is something quite unique.

The inversion of practice within Denis' film making is of utmost importance. The conversational style of collaborating and creating means both Tindersticks and Denis are as integral to the process as the other.

'Stuart Staples has become part of my films, he is in them. He is not just interested in making music for a film, he is interested in meaning and that is important because it can't be a last minute addition.' [Claire Denis]

It is no mistake then that every piece feels so organic, fluid and seamless, as if the visuals and instrumentation have always existed together. Even within the diversity of the content shown through the clips of the evening; train rides, daydreams, sexual desire, torment, oceans, colonialism, comedy, sexual cannibalism, tenderness, complete immersion cannot be resisted. The scores were written collectively and individually thus accounting for the diversity in textures and moods. The senses are drawn and overpowered by each with effusive intensity, quite an experience!

So three gigs into the national UK tour of their showcased collaboration and Stuart Staples, the voice of Tindersticks, addressed the audience with hushed dulcet tones. As his words abated through the microphone it was clear that something was amiss. The signature sound of Tindersticks - one of the reasons die hard fans clamber from miles around to quench their thirst was struggling to project itself. Even carrying an apology through the auditorium was painful and broken. The disappointment was palpable. Staples' rusty yet smooth deep grain, reminiscent of Tom Waits yet with a delicacy of maybe Leonard Cohen, was under considerable strain and thus the order of the evening was altered. With now no interval as had been scheduled, Tindersticks immediately broke into one of their instrumental scores in accompaniment to the reel of Denis' film clips. After a shaky start in which the flute struggled as Staples' voice had to hold its own, we were off.

Amongst the evening's delights was the memorable vision of a floating Nanette lost in thought and hearing the sounds of the poolside whilst swirling in the pool. In this clip from *Nanette et Boni* (1996)

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we are taken by the echoing sounds of the keyboard into her submerged world. A feeling of weightlessness & fluidity ensues with the plinky plonk tones of the xylophone over the staccato melody and echoing notes of keyboard and smooth brushed snare. This is one of the more cheerful, refreshing scores, alongside 'Tiny Tears' with which we taste the evening. Tiny Tears incidentally is a favourite for which Staples reserves his voice, to the delight of the audience.

The train montage from *35 rhums* (2008) is sheer bliss. Signifying the absolute perfection borne of their collaboration; a coeval blend of high art clearly evolving from the same meme - drawing from the same breath. We ride inside the daydream, seemingly becoming energy as we are transported over train track and landscape, night & day. The steady & smooth pattern of shifting minor and major lifted, plucking from the acoustic, sets us in motion to the beat of the train's movement with shakers later joining to reinforce this moving pulse. The long squeezed notes from the melodica's melody float over the top, pulling us into the sway of the train as it bobbles along. Time seems elongated as we become the journey.

L'intrus (2004) comparatively brings us a vast soundscape of a score that has a touch of the Indian raga about it. A constant tone is held as core, around which the other instruments draw upon the gravity of this initial flood overlapping and churning, but remaining within a constant pull and vacuum. The gritty incremental looped strum of the electric guitar brings forth a contrasting regularity, becoming a precursor to changes from the trumpet that haunts with spine tingling intensity. Eventually the echoing distance created by the trumpet is replaced by the soft patter of the snare & hi hat, bringing an earthy texture to answer & ground the atmospheric wail of the brass. The movement over traveling landscape from water to land could be predicted even if the screen were not visible.

The instrumentation is powerful in its delicacy and intricacy throughout all the excerpts, present yet unobtrusive. Yet there is a definite growth that can be heard throughout their body of work as a whole, especially within the latter films such as *White Material* (2009) and *35 rhums* (2008), in which the signature sounds of Tindersticks are more elaborate and tangible. This fits with the history of the band - after disbanding and getting back together they entered a process of becoming and reestablishing. The weight and gravity of the scores penetrate whilst simultaneously evoking a levity that calls and stimulates something higher, evoking an ephemeral reaction.

This depth of feeling reached through the music says more than words ever could, fitting Denis' style perfectly. That of her economy of dialogue, elliptical even & use of shots which are sometimes almost photographic stills. In fact these specific aspects of the collaboration are reminiscent in a living dynamic form of Chris Marker's film *La Jette* (1962). Made up entirely of black and white photographic stills it uses only dialogue and instrumentation to tell the story.

As a newcomer to these artists I was blown away by the work they have created, and would recommend it in its entirety to anyone who wants to experience the true art of synergy. Dive right in. The performance itself had a few obvious glitches and started on the back foot, as it were, from the beginning. However the magic created over the years was not diminished by any measure because of that. An absolutely unfaltering body of work that captures the essence of what it sets out to do. Compared to a breath of musical stasis akin to an operatic aria – magic results.

With thanks to [Dr Holly Rogers](#) from The School of Music, University of Liverpool for the pre-show chat.