Transcript for Set List: Amosphere

[Amo Chip Dabney] I’ve had this band, the Amosphere, for a few years and we’ve gone through a few different players. James and I have been playing together for about five years in the band. I’ve known Tom for over 20 years. We’ve played in some other bands and when I was looking for a top-notch keyboard player his name popped-up and he was available so we got Tom. Clay Brown and I have been working together in another group called Zo and the Soul Breakers, and I invited him into this about two, two-and-a half years ago, two years ago?

[Clay Brown] Two

[Dabney] Two, and Bryan is the newest member of the band and a great addition. We got him about a year ago.

[musicians play “Would You Could You”]

[Dabney] Would You Could You by Tom Fetterer and Mike Olsen and the Amosphere

[Dabney] I’m a multi-instrumentalist. I play saxophone, keyboards and bass guitar. I play percussion, sing. I’m probably missing something else in there, there is a trumpet or a xylophone in the closet. I like artists from all those styles. I like some of the jazz cats from way back, Sydney Bechet, the Preservation Hall Jazz Band guys. I like clarinet players like Eric Dolphy, jazz players. I like, oh, a lot of the pop artists that came through in the 60’s and 70’s influenced my music like The Four Tops and The Temptations and James Brown. That sort of stuff. I like some eclectic styles from new age artists Brian Eno type stuff. I myself have recorded several albums and CDs in that genre. Gone to the Grammy’s twice with New Age records. I like the blues, the B.B. King kind of blues for lack of, I don’t want to leave anybody out, so Keb’ Mo something like that. Hard to pin it down to a two-day conversation.

[Dabney with music beginning] This piece is an original piece of mine it’s called Gill Scott. It’s dedicated to the late, great social poet, probably the father of hip-hop music as we know it and rap, Gill Scott-Heron, passed away a couple years ago in May. I really loved him when they were doing some stuff with the Last Poets in New York. They changed a lot of cultural-awareness in the late 60’s. We miss him. This one’s called Gill Scott.

[musicians playing]

[Dabney] You know I was thinking about Gill Scott because he passed and I thought, oh man, people don’t really know all of the stuff this man did. So in the song there is a litany of titles from his vast discography of tunes like, you know, Whitey on the Moon, Lady Day and John Coltrane, and other references we were making in the song. So that was a tribute song. It was very targeted in the sense that I wanted to say something about a person that existed and his body of work. They used to go with
a very sparse kind of a format delivery in their music. They didn’t have a lot of flutes and guitars and clarinets and oboes running through the music. It was basically percussion groove-based music. So the song is simple in that way, simplistic and the bass line is repetitive, does it’s little thing, and then the poetry of the lyrics are reflective of what Gill Scott was about.

[Dabney] This is a Keb’ Mo tune called Dangerous Mood. Sometimes you find yourself in just that way.

[musicians playing]

[Dabney] What we really want to do with our music, my music, is to move people. Literally on the dance floor. Oh yeah, and there’s my chair going. Are you getting that? What frequency’s that? Literally on the dance floor. You want to get them out of their chairs, off of their barstools and gyrate to the music as long as possible – it’s sort of a ritual in a sense. I recently released a solo piano album, and it’s far more cerebral. They’re improvisations and they are once again like the Eric Dolphy thing, they are one of a kind. I don’t want to try to recreate them, sure I could sit down and write out chart, hack it out, but it won’t be the same because it was the inspiration of the moment. So there’s that kind of music too which is the inspiration of the moment. You’re not trying to sell or really move a mass of people directly although a lot of people like the music. It’s more like you’re just having a conversation with your own soul and because of the technology you’re able to capture it on disc or tape or whatever medium.

[musicians playing]

[Dabney] Improvisation to me, and I hate to use the word like purist, but it’s a really raw form of music and it’s like if you’re a conversationalist or somebody who does a lot of talking when you’re going to put your presentation together you don’t have to write it out and rehearse it, you can just stand up and you know start talking. We like to get together in an informal situation and just play. Everybody knows the keys and the scales and all that sort of stuff so you get a chance to feed your creative juices by just starting the music and everybody sort of contributes to it in their own way. It takes on this immediate life that after it’s over it’s gone. You’re not going to, “Hey, play that again.” No. Hopefully we recorded it and you can play it back that way but it’s like Eric Dolphy said, “When you hear live music it’s in the air and once it’s over it’s gone and you can never capture it again.” I like that, you know. You have to be here to partake.

[musicians playing]

[Dabney] This is a tune called Wild Tchoupitoulas and what it’s about is these masking Mardi Gras Indians that put together their own suits. And a lot of people don’t realize that the men who march in these parades take this a) very seriously and b) they do their own sewing thing. They put the suit together. It’s a meticulous suit, it’s very elaborate. The whole contest really is about who is the prettiest. So these bands of Mardi Gras Indians used to fight until George Lundy came along and said, “I got a better idea. Let’s sew.” So they started to make these parades, and the great plumage and what have you, full regalia. It has become a serious tradition down in New Orleans, to the point where these black indian chiefs, some of my people, it’s the most important event of the whole year for them. And when New Orleans was hit by Katrina and all that was lost, one of the traditions that moved to Houston or Austin or Tucson or where have you were the masking Mardi Gras Indians. So we want to keep some of that alive so we play these songs. This one’s called Wild Tchoupitoulas.
[musicians playing]

[Tom Fetter] To talk about the music scene in Tucson, I think one of the interesting this about Tucson is the way so many different musicians mingle. I mean he’s in band, he’s in... everybody is in different bands and then we come together here and other people are that way too. I don’t know if it’s unique but it’s certainly friendly.

[Bryan Dean] It’s a tight community

[Tom Fetter] Everybody backs each other up, I think, at least among the circle of people that we’re in. It’s not competitive I think everybody supports everybody. I think that’s a great thing.

[Dabney] I’ve lived in other cities around this country, on the East Coast, in the Mid-West and in the South and in California. You know like in the New York area it’s a very, very competitive music scene. I mean guys don’t want to share any information or they have their rolodex full of names, “Hey man, I need a drummer.” “Oh, can’t help you. You’re not getting my drummer.” Tucson is the antithesis of that. I find that because it is a smaller market, it’s a friendly market. You have really a lot of world-class musicians here who share. You’ll have a John Coinman come out and he’s done a bunch a songs and travelled all over and I’ll come out and bring my guitar and sit in with Amo Chip and friends or something. A lot of us do the same thing. We play in different units. Tonight and every Monday night pretty much in December as well Bryan Dean is playing down at the Boondocks. It’s a free gig. It’s called Mama’s Meatloaf. It’s like 6-8. He’s there with his wife Koko on bass and one of the great drummers in this town, another guy that’s been around, Ralph Gilmore. And it’s a free gig. So, I mean, we’re all going down there. We’re down there all the time. These guys have come to some of my other events in other bands and sat in. James can be seen down at Chicago Bar with Neon Prophet. They’re one of the great bands in this town because this guy for 26 years has been packing this room on Saturday night. Come on, 26 years you know. A lot of clubs don’t even last that long. You have to really care about what you do and then you have to bring it on stage for it to sustain that long and to have a vibrant, creative musical community. And it’s not just the musical community here, you’ve got a vibrant artistic community in Tucson. Must be the sun or something.

[Dabney, music starting] Chuck-a-chuck-a-chuck-a. So we like to hang out in this little neighborhood called Treme and that’s what this is called Treme.

[musicians playing]

[Dabney] We are at the Chicago Bar every Friday pretty much, every now and then we have a private gig that pays 10 million times more so we do it. I have, oh my, I have an extensive discography. I’ve recorded over 50 records with different artists. I’m on Canyon Records with R. Carlos Nakai and his R. Carlos Nakai Quartet. I have three of my own records out that you can get from me at www.amochip.me. It’s all about... you know. You can also get the solo piano album on iTunes and CDBaby. If you google Amo Chip, I’m the only one so I’ll come up.
[Dabney] I mean we did the blues festival the other week. We rocked the house and right away that weekend there were some new people at our regular gig so you want to create enough merchandise to sell it that is full of integrity and you can stand behind and at the same time get in front of as many people as possible to create a bigger audience.

[music]