

Islands In

The Stream

Tom Malmendier (left) and Emilie Škrijelj in Berlin, April 2026

Emilie Škrijelj & Tom Malmendier

The French-Belgian duo incorporate accordion, percussion and turntablism into unexpected spaces as well as the flow of everyday life

By Daryl Worthington
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A playlist titled *presque île* on Tom Malmendier's YouTube page hosts, at time of writing, 26 videos of the Belgian percussionist improvising with French accordionist and turntablist Emilie Škrijelj. Each video is captured with a mobile phone and a single audio recorder. Almost all take place outside, and none occurs in a typical music venue. Settings include a tunnel leading to the beach in Porto, a runway at Berlin's decommissioned Tempelhof Airport, and a ridge overlooking a picturesque Swiss village. On 2020's "*presque île #7*", recorded in Ostend, Belgium, Škrijelj plays a tiny accordion and Malmendier scrapes, taps and skims across a small snare drum while a building is loudly demolished beside them.

"When you play outside, every sound becomes music in a way," suggests Škrijelj on a video call, sitting alongside Malmendier in their home in Scy-Chazelles, a village close to Metz, France. "In these videos you have a real spatialisation to the sound, you hear things far away, very close, all around. Really, the space is a partner of the performance."

Škrijelj and Malmendier have electrifying vocabularies as improvisors, using tools and techniques to extend the possibilities of their respective instruments. Most of their recorded output captures them in typical music venues, either as a duo or in collaboration with others. However, ongoing projects – like *presque île* – build symbiotic relationships with unconventional settings.

The *presque île* collection – the name translates literally to almost island, and means peninsula – sit somewhere between postcards and an archive of spontaneous music making. On Škrijelj's website they're presented as a hyperlinked map of Europe, charting where each session took place. They are made on tour, residency or holidays. "This is a nice place, this is a nice picture, let's try something," Malmendier explains about the considerations before filming each video.

"They're not really a performance," suggests Škrijelj. "We like to be inside and part of daily life."

Malmendier continues the thread. "Things are happening around us. We're not an attraction, even if what we're doing might seem weird."

The pair began collaborating in 2019 as Les Marquises, with Škrijelj free improvising on accordion, electronics and turntables, and Malmendier on a full drum kit. On their 2019 debut *Les Marquises*, and 2025's *Live In Nickelsdorf*, Škrijelj spins and scratches vinyl into bamboozling, almost cartoonish flows which Malmendier's drums skitter and tumble through. When Škrijelj moves to accordion her playing makes it seem like an electronic rather than acoustic instrument.

"We like to play fusions of timbres," Škrijelj elaborates. "It's something a bit maximalist in a way."

"At least in the intensity," adds Malmendier. "It's not necessarily about being loud."

That intensity is especially acute on 2025's *weird morning meeting*, a 2024 live recording of their ongoing collaboration with Otomo Yoshihide, which sees Malmendier's drums ricochet around Škrijelj and Yoshihide's riotous turntable duels. Meanwhile, this year's *Faux Pas*, a quartet album recorded in New York with guitarist Webb Crawford and saxophonist Michael Foster, is vine-like, a slippery maze where instruments knot into each other atop a constantly redirecting momentum.

A recent UK tour saw the duo take a different tack. Škrijelj brought along a smaller, portable turntable, Malmendier just a single snare. They focused more intently on using everyday objects – shoe brushes, cutlery, towels – to extend the timbres of their instruments. That move encapsulates their striving to be as autonomous as possible, an independent spirit paralleled by the fact that most of their recordings are published on their own *eux sœm* imprint, with each CD's artwork by Škrijelj.

"We can fit all our equipment in two suitcases, we can basically play anywhere," enthuses Škrijelj about their stripped down set-up. "All we need is electricity, we don't need a sound system."

Through their more austere set-up, the timbral depth of the duo's playing and the speed and dexterity with which it manifests is even more striking. *GLASGOW*, recorded live at The Old Hairdressers on this year's tour, sees Škrijelj spend as much time using objects to scrape the surface of vinyl and record player as working with the audio on the records. Malmendier brushes, beats and dampens the snare, warping the surface as he plays intricate rhythms across it. Sometimes, there's symmetry in their playing, the pair focusing on similar objects, techniques and textures. At other points, they refract and splinter, making assemblages equal parts serrated and coruscating.

"Sometimes I can't tell who's making each sound," admits Malmendier. "We're often layering the same frequencies and textures, we like making these bubbles of sound where things aren't separate."

Glitch, a Škrijelj solo piece for amplified accordion, sees her extend the instrument spatially as well as timbrally. At a recent London performance she struck, shook and squeezed sounds through multiple speakers, including transducers connected to metal objects spread around the floor. As she adjusted settings on a mixer, different objects were excited, metallic stridulations and resonances smothering the accordion's natural tones.

"I like using these kind of lo-fi speakers," Škrijelj says. "I prefer them to using pedal effects or a computer as a way to extend the instrument. It's a physical phenomenon. You can see sound is vibration."

Transducers and space are also integral to *BRUINE*, a trio of Škrijelj, Malmendier and German clarinetist Michael Thieke. Even more than *Glitch*, *BRUINE* – the title means drizzle – blurs the border between installation and performance. The trio improvise while their instruments' signals are sent through transducers attached to metal objects around the room, causing them to susurrate and shake. Midway through each performance, Malmendier moves away from the drum kit and starts rearranging speakers and objects, changing the timbre and placement of sound. Those objects, including a judicious collection of piping, are components typically used in plumbing and ventilation, borrowed from the workshops of friends of Škrijelj's father.

BRUINE performances typically occur in unconventional venues, such as factories and museums, where boundaries between listener and artist, stage and audience can be easily broken. On occasion it's also morphed into an installation after the initial gig, prerecorded sounds from the trio left to diffuse through the transducers, objects and space.

"It's very spatialised," explains Malmendier. "So, we ask the audience to move around if possible. The music is very different from one place to another due to the small acoustic sounds and the vibrations it creates."

"We move the objects and move the sound," adds Škrijelj. "It's really concrete."

An album version, recorded in Reims in 2024, is a deeply timbred tapestry that retains the rich layers of metallic resonance the piece generates live. On paper it sounds complex. But Malmendier and Škrijelj see *BRUINE* as an autonomous, DIY project compelled by the same embrace of constraints and portability as their recent stripped-down sets.

"When we prepare and put all the objects for *BRUINE* in the car, I feel like an artisan," declares Škrijelj. "We arrive at a venue with all our materials. We can come and play anywhere. We're sound artists, but we're also sound artisans." ● *Emilie Škrijelj & Tom Malmendier's GLASGOW is released by scatterArchive. Crawford/ Foster/Malmendier/ Škrijelj's Faux Pas is released by eux sœm*