



Bio information: **RICHARD PINHAS & BARRY CLEVELAND** [Featuring **MICHAEL MANRING & CELSO ALBERTI**]
Title: **MU** (Cuneiform Rune 426) Format: CD / DIGITAL

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**Richard Pinhas and Barry Cleveland Explore Zen and the Art of Improvisation on
Mu, a Startlingly Strange and Beautiful Quartet Session
with Bass Innovator Michael Manring and Brazilian Drum Maestro Celso Alberti**

One day a troubled monk approached Joshu, a renowned Chinese Zen master, intending to ask him for guidance. A dog walked by and the monk asked Joshu, "Has that dog a Buddha Nature or not?" The monk had barely completed his question when Joshu shouted: "Mu!"

'Mu' is often translated as "nothingness," but as the response in Zen's most famous koan, the gesture speaks to a truth deeper than rational dualistic thinking can obtain—therefore also resonating with the creative mindset accompanying the purest forms of musical improvisation.

The music created by French guitar iconoclast and electronic music pioneer **Richard Pinhas** and insistently inventive San Francisco Bay Area guitarist **Barry Cleveland** on *Mu* originated in just such a way, arising seemingly from "nothingness." The two had contemplated performing as well as recording together for several years before their stars finally aligned during Pinhas' **2013 North American Tour**. The guitarists played several Bay Area shows as a duo and invited two other musicians to join them for a studio session lasting less than four hours. *Mu*, the remarkable document stemming from this brief yet profoundly potent studio encounter, is slated for release on **Cuneiform Records** on Sept. 16, 2016.

Unfettered by genre conventions, *Mu* is a mesmerizing combination of entirely improvised music and Cleveland's post-production compositional development. The four long pieces unfurl as a confluence of overlapping musical currents informed by art rock, ambient, electronic, avant-garde jazz, and various "world" music inflections. Joined by two longtime Cleveland collaborators—electric bass innovator **Michael Manring** and Brazilian-born drum master **Celso Alberti**—these expansive and timeless soundscapes feel unlike anything created before them.

"I've worked with Michael for years and he and Celso were both featured on my previous album, *Hologramatron*, as well as in the band of the same name," Cleveland explains. "**Hologramatron** had opened for Richard a couple of times here in California, so he was familiar with Michael and Celso's playing and readily agreed that we should record together as a quartet."

Pinhas' distinctive musical aesthetic is facilitated by his **Metatronic** live-looping and effects system that enables him to create an astonishing variety of tones and textures and layer them into continually changing stream-of-consciousness soundscapes. His approach on *Mu* was especially dynamic. "Besides opening up fresh sonic horizons himself, Richard did an impressive job of responding to the rapid shifts in tempo, tonality, and intensity of the quartet, which is far from easy when using a looping system such as his," explains Cleveland. "His performance on '**I Wish I Could Talk In Technicolor**,' in particular, may be the most dynamic and nuanced I've heard from him yet."

Cleveland's aesthetic is equally sui generis. In addition to playing guitar in the conventional manner he plays with a bow, a bowhammer, an EBow, and other devices, as well as using sophisticated electronics and looping to access intriguing new aural realms. On *Mu*, he also played Moog Guitar, sitar guitar, Vocalizer 1000 woodwind synth, M-Tron, zither, kalimba, gong, and incidental percussion.

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“Hyperbassist” Michael Manring’s mind-blowing virtuosity is equaled only by the richness of feeling expressed in his playing. He and drummer/percussionist Celso Alberti, a master of multiple rhythmic traditions, share a near-psychedelic connection that enlivens their truly uncanny interactions.

Following their recording session, Cleveland spent months “overdubbing different instruments, including the remarkable Moog Guitar, and arranging, processing, and mixing the core tracks into complete musical statements. Long stretches of the improvised material were used in their entirety (“**I Wish I Could Talk In Technicolor**” and “**Zen/Unzen**”), which helps explain the music’s cohesive flow. The final touch was composing ‘**Forgotten Man**’ around an extended guitar-synth track by Richard, including programming the percussion parts.”

“My production and mixing fingerprints are all over *Mu*, and may even be evident to those familiar with my other recordings,” Cleveland says. “But the essential character of the music is the result of four unique musicians improvising together on a particular day, at a particular time, and the creative possibilities and energies available to them in that moment.” It’s the kind of confidently interactive invention that can only take place with deeply connected musicians.

While not originally intended as a suite, *Mu* is effectively an audio odyssey that flows naturally from beginning to end.

Mu opens with the darkly cinematic “**Forgotten Man**.” It’s the only track without Manring and Alberti, but Cleveland’s programmed percussion keeps the mysterious gentleman on the move, wending his way across churning synthesizer landscapes driven by the polyrhythmic pulse of tribal drumming and ever-shifting permutations of the soaring melody.

The album’s 26-minute centerpiece, “**I Wish I Could Talk In Technicolor**,” seduces the listener into an enigmatic and at times unsettling world of strange new sounds and tonal colorations that are in turns intimate and orchestral in scope. One moment an alluring soundscape propelled by hypnotic kalimba rhythms and Pinhas’ pulsating guitar loops; the next exotic atmospherics hovering atop Manring’s elastic bass figures and Alberti’s rapid-fire electronic kit work; the next full immersion in trippy textures infused with sitar guitar; and the next a spacy art-rock excursion featuring Pinhas’ multidimensional droning and Cleveland’s bowed guitar layering, dynamic looping, and fuzz-drenched soloing.

“**Zen/Unzen**” uncoils gradually like a sonic Slinky, continually generating fresh kinetic waves. An evocative Pinhas’ guitar loop becomes suffused with coruscating Moog Guitar textures, before Manring and Alberti emerge into the foreground and establish an Afro-tinged groove with uncommon power and authority. Jon Hassell-inspired melodies executed on a toy woodwind synth and jazzy faux trumpet MIDI guitar lines push the piece into world-fusion territory, while runaway Echoplex sounds nod in the direction of electric Miles.

The gorgeous closer, “**Parting Waves**,” blends moody loops and brooding EBow bass with cascading 12-string guitar clusters and a majestic yet mournful melody that swells and then subsides before gradually merging into the sound of breaking waves punctuated by the cries of distant gulls.

In bringing together this singular quartet, Cleveland and Pinhas take another bold step with *Mu*. Given their long histories of innovation and experimentation it shouldn’t be surprising to find them venturing into the unknown. But there’s still something inspiring about witnessing veteran artists willing to follow a thread of inspiration into the void, only to emerge with new revelations. “In many ways,” says Cleveland, “this album represents the culmination of concepts and techniques I’ve been developing my entire life.”

Mu, the first Richard Pinhas / Barry Cleveland collaboration to be released by Cuneiform, should appeal to fans of such artists as **Jon Hassell**, **Arve Henriksen**, **Nils Petter Molvær**, **Bill Laswell**, **David Torn**, **Brian Eno**, **David Sylvian**, and **David Bowie**.

For more information on Richard Pinhas & Barry Cleveland:

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PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of this image are available on the Richard Pinhas artist page @ www.cuneiformrecords.com



BIO INFO FOR MU

RICHARD PINHAS

A major figure in experimental music since the early 1970s, Pinhas pioneered progressive guitar and electronic fusion that paralleled some of **Robert Fripp**'s explorations with **King Crimson**. Always looking to expand his creative possibilities, he deftly combined analog synthesizers with rock instrumentation in his celebrated band **Heldon**.

Pinhas launched the band after earning a PhD in philosophy from the Sorbonne, where he studied with French philosopher **Gilles Deleuze**. Heldon may be seen as a musical elaboration on his dissertation examining the intersections of time, time manipulation, science fiction, and analog electronic music. Fusing his searing guitar with experimental electronics, the band revolutionized rock music in France with a series of releases on his pioneering French indie label **Disjuncta** (reissued, like the rest of his brilliant catalog, by **Cuneiform**). Beginning in the 1990s, Cuneiform began to release a steady stream of new solo releases by Pinhas, who blazed new trails on rock's cutting edge with his "Metatronic" system of guitar and various new digital electronics. Prolific as ever in recent years, Pinhas continues to release highly innovative solo albums, while also collaborating with a wide range of artists, including French musicians **Pascal Comelade** and **Noël Akchote**, Japanese noise legend **Merzbow**, American noise rockers **Wolf Eyes**, prog-rock guru **Tatsuya Yoshida**, and Australian multi-instrumentalist **Oren Ambarchi**, with whom he recorded 2014's arresting *Tikkun*.

Pinhas' influence on current music and the other arts is expansive. Often-cited examples include **Daft Punk**'s headwear, which was clearly inspired by the futuristic helmet on the cover of Heldon's 1978 album *Interface*, and **My Bloody Valentine**'s Heldon-like wall-of-sound guitar assaults. New electronic and digital artists and DJs are emulating Pinhas' 70s work and incorporating it into their own. Heldon's music remains vital and unsurpassed today, evident in a worldwide revival among a younger generation. Heldon tracks have been sampled by **UNKLE** and by legendary electronic artist **Bill Laswell**, and have been included in a DJ compilation by **Four Tet**. New audiences are seeking vinyl reissues of Pinhas' early works, and young musicians who credit his oeuvre as a key influence seek his collaboration for new albums, such as his 2013 release with **Etienne Jaumet** (of **Zombie Zombie**). richard-pinhas.com

BARRY CLEVELAND

Cleveland first gained attention in 1986 with the release of *Mythos* on **Larry "Synergy" Fast**'s legendary **Audion Recording Company** label. The album combined layers of guitar with woodwinds, synthesizers, percussion, and cymbalom, as well as making extensive use of **Brian Eno**-style tape looping. *Voluntary Dreaming*, released in 1989, encroached upon world fusion territory with its blend of electronics, African and Middle Eastern percussion, cymbalom, and pedal-steel guitar.

Cleveland was a member of the improvisational quintet **Cloud Chamber** during the 1990s. Featuring bassist **Michael Manring**, cellist **Dan Reiter**, percussionist **Joe Venegoni**, and multi-instrumentalist **Michael Masley**, the group performed throughout the Bay Area and released the celebrated *Dark Matter* in 1998.

In 2003, Cleveland released *Volcano*, an explosive mixture of African and Afro-Haitian rhythms and progressive, jazz, and ambient influences featuring bassist Michael Manring, percussionist **Michael Pluznick**, and **Norbert Stachel** on saxes, flutes, and clarinets. The following year saw the release of *Memory & Imagination*, a two-disc compilation that also included nine new compositions.

Cleveland released the critically acclaimed *Hologramatron* in 2010, a modern-day "protest album" that spans a musical continuum from art rock to ambient to avant-metal to psych-pop. Propelled by Manring and Alberti, the recording also features pedal-steel guitarist **Robert Powell** and vocalist **Amy X Neuburg**, as well as contributions from **Deborah Holland**, **Harry Manx**, and other notable artists. Other recent projects include contributing music to an upcoming solo **Stephan Thelen** (of **SONAR**) album, and scoring music and doing sound design for a video game.

Parallel to his musical endeavors, Cleveland has pursued a career as a music journalist, serving as an editor at *Guitar Player* magazine for 12 years and *Mix* and *Electronic Musician* magazines previous to that. He authored the cult classic *Joe Meek's Bold Techniques*, and contributed to *Whole Lotta Led Zeppelin, the Illustrated History of the Heaviest Band of All Time*. He is currently the editor of *The Lodge*, and continues to write for various publications. barrycleveland.com

MICHAEL MANRING

Mentored by the legendary **Jaco Pastorius**, Manring is arguably the world's leading solo electric bassist. He first gained widespread notice in the 1980s through his work as house bassist for **Windham Hill Records**, particularly via his creatively charged collaboration with the late guitar master **Michael Hedges**, and the supergroup **Montreux** (with violinist **Darol Anger**, pianist **Barbara Higbie**, and mandolinist **Mike Marshall**). Throughout the intervening years, he has performed and recorded with dozens of luminaries, from **Alex de Grassi** and **Will Ackerman** to **Alex Skolnick** and **Steve Morse** to **Henry Kaiser** and **Wadada Leo Smith**, with whom he founded the electric-period **Miles Davis** tribute project **Yo Miles!** Manring has released six albums as a leader, collaborated on many more, and appeared on several hundred. manthing.com

CELSO ALBERTI

Born in Curitiba, Brazil, Alberti became a professional drummer and percussionist by the age of 17, and absorbed an array of Afro-Brazilian rhythmic idioms. Relocating to New York in 1982, he quickly made a name for himself on the city's burgeoning Brazilian jazz scene, performing with guitar great **Toninho Horta**, singer **Clarice Taylor** and the **New York Samba Band**. By 1984, Alberti was in the Bay Area, where he joined the San Francisco-based Brazilian band **Terra Sul**. He gained further international exposure touring and recording with legendary percussionist **Airto Moreira** and his wife singer **Flora Purim**, contributing to 1986's *The Magicians* and 1993's *The Flight*. Alberti has also toured and recorded with **Herbie Mann**, **Steve Winwood**, guitarist **Joyce Cooling**, vocalist **Jon Lucien**, percussionist **Kit Walker**, bassoonist **Paul Hanson**, saxophonist **George Brooks**, bassist **Kai Eckhardt** and Brazilian stars such as singer **Emilio Santiago**, guitarist **Chico Pinheiro**, and singer/songwriter **Claudia Villela**. celsoalberti.com

Barry Cleveland on Mu

The album title is *Mu*, a Japanese word commonly translated as “no,” or “nothingness.” There’s a well-known Zen koan in which a student asks his master Joshu whether a dog has a Buddha nature or not, and the master responds, “Mu.” It occurred to me that there are parallels between the state of mind cultivated in koan meditation and the state of mind that results in transcendent improvisational performances. Call it Zen and the art of musical improvisation if you like. Regardless of whether the connections are real or merely imagined, the core sections of the music on *Mu* were entirely improvised and seemingly materialized out of nothing, so there is at least a *poetic* resonance with the concept of nothingness.

Improvisation plays a significant role in what Richard and I both do musically, and few things are as exciting to me as going into a project with no preconceptions other than an implicit faith in The Muse. The conventional wisdom is that even under the most favorable circumstances you will need to record many hours of improvised music to get enough strong material for an entire album, and even then it will probably be necessary to edit shorter bits together to achieve that end.

Well, for various reasons we had less than four hours together to record as a quartet, yet nearly all of the core tracks for the album were recorded in that time, and long stretches of the improvised material were consistent enough to be used in their entirety.

From there, I spent many months developing the music by overdubbing different instruments and arranging, processing, and mixing the core tracks into complete musical statements. The final touch was composing the opening track, “Forgotten Man,” around an extended guitar synth track by Richard, including programming the percussion parts. Along the way there were numerous happy accidents.

For example, I was trying out a sitar-like guitar sound in a section of “I Wish I Could Talk In Technicolor,” and I somewhat mindlessly played an elongated and oddly phrased version of a line from “Within You Without You.” I hadn’t planned to actually use the track, but, mysteriously, Michael Manring’s bass part worked with the odd phrasing and harmonized with it perfectly—as if we had arranged the section intentionally. I practically fell out of my chair while listening to the playback.

Another interesting event that happened is that Celso Alberti played an electronic drum kit when we recorded the basic tracks as a quartet, but later decided to replace most of those parts with acoustic drums, because he felt they would sound better and allow for more dynamic and nuanced performances. If anyone else proposed rerecording the drum parts on wildly nonlinear improvisations lasting about 26 minutes and ten minutes each, I would have just laughed. Celso not only pulled it off, he did it in single takes, and the parts were even better than the already superb originals.

When we first discussed the project, Richard said he thought our goal should be to make a recording that would still sound vital and fresh decades later, and I’d like to think we have achieved that.

The music on *Mu* sounds very different than anything I have released previously, and I think the same can be said for Richard. In fact, there are long stretches of music on the album that don’t sound like anything I’ve ever heard before by anyone.

— Barry Cleveland, *Summer 2016*

What Others Have Said About Barry Cleveland’s Previous Albums

“There are a handful of albums in my life that hit me the way this album [*Hologramatron*] did. For me it sits in a small group of very special musical experiences: David Byrne and Brian Eno’s *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, Bill Bruford’s *Feels Good to Me*, NIN’s *Downward Spiral*, and King Crimson’s *Discipline*.”
—Reeves Gabrels (David Bowie, The Cure)

"Barry Cleveland's third album finds the renowned guitarist and composer exploring the nuances of rhythm. Drawing from a varied palette of traditions, timbres and tonalities, *Volcano* bridges the impressionist leanings of his previous releases with a more audacious, kinetic approach. Listeners will appreciate the disc's pulsing rhythms, inter-weaving melodies, and layers of evocative atmospheres." —Anil Prasad, *Innerviews*

"Cleveland has a full command of his instrument, both as a player and a shaper of sound, utilizing all manner of processing to create sounds that are at times distinctly un-guitarlike. But what is most revealing about his approach is that Cleveland sees the guitar more as a means to an end rather than the end itself."
—John Kelman, *All About Jazz*

"Barry Cleveland's highly imaginative and resplendent guitar playing incorporates elements from a panoply of sources—including, but certainly not limited to progressive rock, psychedelic effects, ambient and new age soundscapes, world, jazz, funk and other (re)sources. Like Jimmy Page, for instance, he sometimes bows his electric guitar. To that, add Cleveland's keen command of digital and analog recording studio devices and techniques. All told, you've a pretty talented cat on your hands."
—Robert Kaye, *Abstract Logix*

"Much of Cleveland's work doesn't sound like the work of your conventional guitarist at all, but rather a far-reaching compositional visionary who uses whatever instruments and processes necessary to achieve his ends."
—Peter Thelen, *Exposé*

"Sometimes spacey, oftentimes jazzy, Cleveland's fascinating take on ethnic-flavored progressive jazz brims with an Afro-Haitian multirhythmic undercurrent that is nothing short of infectious, beguiling, and ultimately seductive. The multi-dimensionality of this album is impressive. Not only is there a lot going on most of the time, the music also has room to breathe."
—John Collinge, *Progression*