



Bio information: **YANG**  
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## **Uneasy Listening: YANG's new *DESIGNED FOR DISASTER* Captures the Tenor of Our Times**

As a child, YANG composer and guitarist Frédéric L'Épée suffered from an exaggerated fear of loud sounds—a condition that was not alleviated by growing up in a musical family. “Every noise, even music, was frightening to me,” he recalls. “I liked music that I could hear on the speakers, for example, or something that was a little bit far away. But if my grandfather was playing accordion, I had a kind of baby phrase I would say: ‘Please don’t play accordion to my ears,’ because it was unbearable for me. And when my father played violin as well, it was too loud when it was in the room.”

Discovering the electric guitar changed all that, although this revelation could easily have gone very wrong. L'Épée recalls an early experiment in electrification that literally ended with a bang, when he mistakenly plugged his first instrument into an AC power outlet instead of the family stereo. But the young musician persevered, forming his first serious band, Shylock, in his teens and waxing two now highly collectible albums with that formation; moving on to the instrumental-oriented combo Philharmonie, which produced a further five full-length LPs; and then working with YANG since 2004.

The European quartet's fourth release, *Designed for Disaster*—its second for Cuneiform—just might be its loudest yet.

But it's always *purposeful* noise, as demonstrated by the new album's fifth track, “Words”. Over an ominously martial beat, L'Épée and his bandmates shout single-word slogans: “Stark”, “Frei”, “Fight”, “Klang”, “Bruit”, et cetera. These are almost but not quite drowned out by a barrage of distorted electric guitars; the effect is that an unknown and threatening authority figure is issuing enigmatic orders, with a consequence for those who don't obey. It's eerie, and unsettling.

“I'm very happy to hear that, because that's certainly my intention,” L'Épée comments. “I don't want people to really follow the words and try to explain what is being said; it's mostly to *feel* things.”

L'Épée's use of words—a new development for YANG, which has previously concentrated on instrumentals—is “meant to communicate an impression and not a meaning”, he points out. “Descendance”, *Designed for Disaster*'s opening track, is similarly uncanny; backed by a surging bassline, guest vocalist Ayşe Cansu Tanrikulu intones “If the moment feels unsafe/maybe easy again to disconnect”.

“How to explain that?” L'Épée muses. “For me, like a lot of other people, I feel that that something is wrong in the world. And with this latest adventure that we've gone through with COVID, I felt that as people we're lost, completely lost. And we are going wrong as we evolve, because people are too egocentric, too much concerned with themselves, and they don't open enough to others. They only want to protect their own belongings and wealth and habits and comfort. They're not ready to really go somewhere with humanity as a species.”

Added to these sociopolitical concerns is a relatively new interest in ancient Chinese culture, expressed here in the concision of L'Épée's wordplay. “In ancient Chinese poetry, there are very few phrases, very few adjectives,” he explains. “Sometimes, but not that much. It's mainly done with images. With a succession of

images, Chinese poetry is supposed to put people in a certain atmosphere—a certain ambience, let's say—that makes them able to feel the spirit of what the poet wanted to express. And in that piece ["Descendance"], it's the same."

L'Épée adds that he's in the process of learning Mandarin so that he can more easily learn how to play ancient Chinese music. With *Designed for Disaster*, however, his compositions primarily have their genesis in Baroque music, minimalism, and of course the progressive rock he gravitated towards as a teenager, with King Crimson's Robert Fripp as his acknowledged guru. The new record's last track, "Despite Origins", is almost a textbook example of these interests, opening with an intricate fugue for electric guitars, moving into a surprisingly accurate (and quite lovely) pastiche of '70s blues-rock guitar heroism, and ending with a bleak recitative that invokes both the digital future and the mock-liturgical feel of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*.

"My favourite composer of *all* composers is Johann Sebastian Bach," L'Épée says. "To me, Bach is the maximum music can go to. And Bach, in some way, is also minimalist, because he uses very, very tiny musical materials, and builds from them cathedrals. Of course my father was a violinist and he was mainly interested in Romantic music, so I've heard that a lot. And when I came into my own as a musician I started listening to other things: very experimental stuff like spectral music, which I use when I play solo and also sometimes when I compose, and minimalist music as well."

Indeed, there are passages on *Designed for Disaster* that sound very much like what Steve Reich, say, might have arrived at had he been writing for two guitars, electric bass, and drums rather than for percussion ensemble. But there are other factors that L'Épée, as YANG's sole composer, constantly takes into consideration. One of these has to do with the group of accomplices he's assembled: bassist Nico Gomez, he notes, has a gift for melody; guitarist Laurent James has a complementary ear for texture; and drummer Volodia Brice is capable of negotiating the most complex time signatures.

"I write for people," he says. "I'm also a classical composer, so I knew how to write for orchestras. But I have to take account of the possibilities of the instruments and also the personalities of the people. And with YANG, I know very well these guys; we are very good friends, and we never fight together. I really imagine every note played by them, each time I compose.

"What is happening is that every musicians plays with his own personality, and I compose with those personalities," he adds. "For another lineup, I would not compose the same at all."

And then there's you, the listener.

"I've always been persuaded that without the audience, music is dead," L'Épée concludes. "So when the audience listens to something, it influences the composer and the musicians, and when a song is listened to, the song is living. It's the same with everything in music and also in poetry: communication with the people makes it really alive. And it's a collective work, of course."

So prepare yourself for discovering YANG's new record. If you're new to the group this will likely lead you on to YANG's earlier work, the *Shylock* and *Philharmonie* albums, and L'Épée's prodigious solo output, but we promise you this: it's a fascinating and worthwhile journey.

## PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available on the **Yang** artist page @ [cuneiformrecords.com](https://cuneiformrecords.com)

