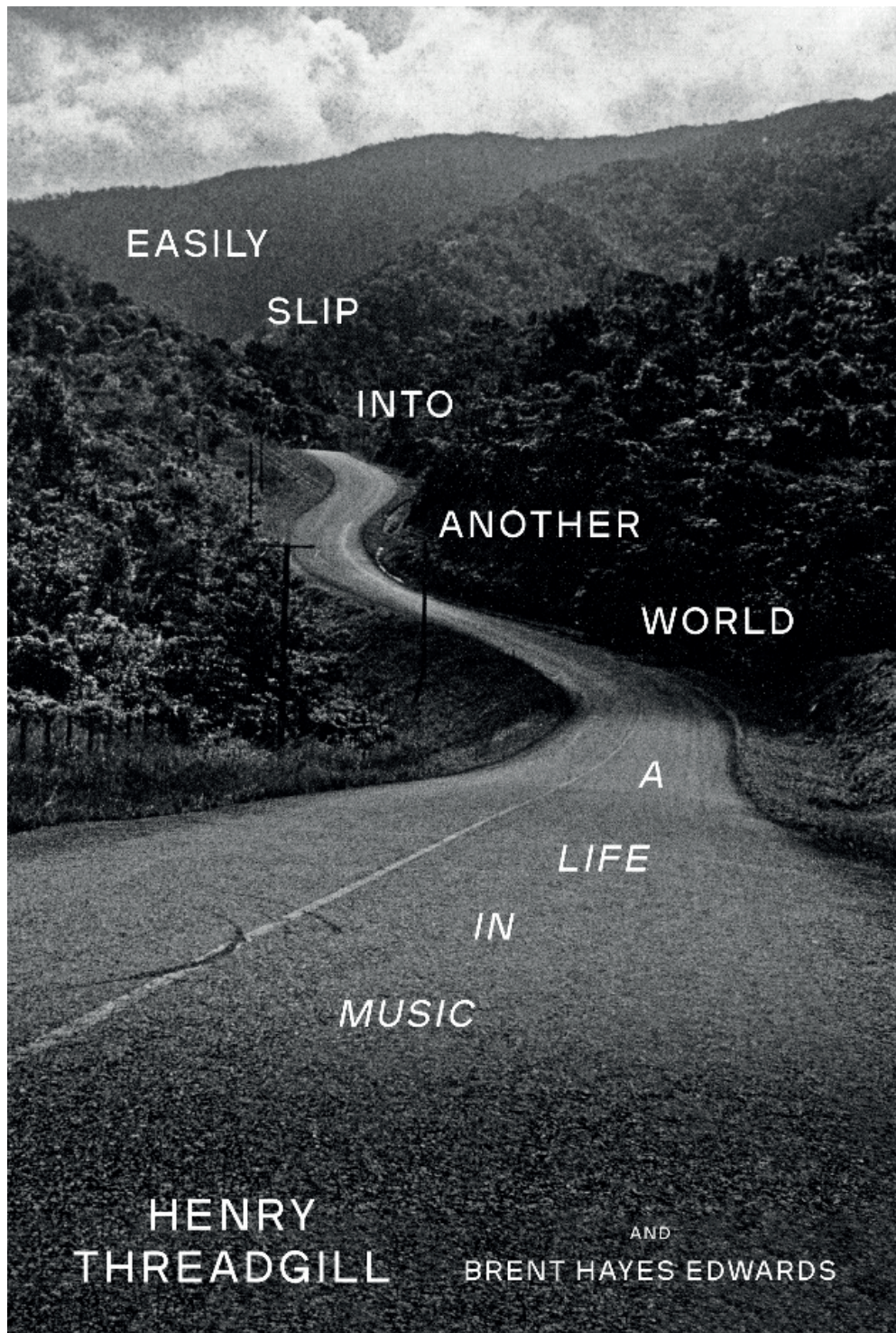


# Music & World

*Study Day*  
**Henry Threadgill's**



*in the presence of Henry Threadgill & Brent Hayes Edwards*

Wednesday, May 22nd, 2024  
10am to 4.30

*University Paris 8 | Vincennes-Saint-Denis  
University of Chicago Center in Paris*

## 10am-12pm | Reading and discussion with Henry Threadgill and Brent Hayes Edwards

In 2023, the composer, saxophonist and flutist Henry Threadgill published his autobiography, *Easily Slip into Another World: A Life in Music*, co-written with the writer and scholar Brent Hayes Edwards. By turns luminous, harrowing, and uproarious, *Easily Slip into Another World* is not only Threadgill's narrative of his upbringing and education in Chicago, his military service during the Vietnam War, his extensive travels, and his brilliant career in music, but also an unforgettable reflection on the complexities of race, capitalism, and music by one of the great visionary artists of our time. Threadgill and Edwards will read selections from the book and participate in a discussion with Alexandre Pierrepont about their collaboration and about Threadgill's singular career.

The composer and multi-instrumentalist **Henry Threadgill** is widely recognized as one of the most original and innovative voices in contemporary music. A Chicago native, he studied at Wilson Junior College and at the American Conservatory of Music and, after serving in Vietnam, joined the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). He has performed on more than thirty albums, including acclaimed releases from his bands Air, X-75, the Henry Threadgill Sextett, Flute Force Four, Very Very Circus, Make a Move, Zooid, and Ensemble Double Up, as well as records by Muhal Richard Abrams, Roscoe Mitchell, Anthony Braxton, David Murray, Wadada Leo Smith, and Leroy Jenkins. His awards include a 2003 Guggenheim Fellowship, a 2016 Doris Duke Award, and a 2016 Excellence in the Arts Award from the Vietnam Veterans of America, and in 2021 he was named a Jazz Master by the National Endowment for the Arts. Threadgill's four-movement work, *In for a Penny, In for a Pound*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2016. His most recent album is *The Other One* (Pi Recordings, 2023).

**Brent Hayes Edwards** is the Peng Family Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York, where he is affiliated with the Center for Jazz Studies. He is also the director of the Scholars-in-Residence Program at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library and the editor of the journal *PMLA*. He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 2015, and in 2020 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Edwards's award-winning books include *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, which has recently been published in French translation by Rot-Bo-Krik (2024); *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (Harvard, 2017); the English translation of Michel Leiris's 1934 classic *L'Afrique fantôme* (Seagull Books, 2017); and *Écrire le monde noir* (Rot-Bo-Krik, 2024), a co-edited volume of the collected interwar writings of Paulette Nardal.

## 2pm-4.30pm | Variations on Henry Threadgill

### *Henry Threadgill, or density*

By Nicolas Stephan

To listen to Henry Threadgill is to watch the compact crowd of passers-by, in a city bursting at the seams, wide and almost sweaty. The humans inside this crowd go in a thousand directions, but they are all one. They narrate a common journey, yet each one digs its own furrow. The superimposition of these traces on the map forms a vibration that could contain a magic capable of shaping the world and its inhabitants in such a way that everyone can live well in it. If we take the trouble to listen (between the lines?).

*This brings us to, "Tomorrow sunny / The Revelry, Spp".*

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### *Attempted Description (of a Henry Threadgill solo)* for Pierre-Antoine Badaroux on alto saxophone, by Jean-Luc Guionnet, alto saxophonist

Passing beyond words.

Go without words.

Do without words...

Thought does that very well, and music even better!

Well, let's not try to prove it, nor that music thinks, but let's try to return this prescient ball:

- 1) by describing in words a Henry Threadgill alto sax solo,
- 2) not saying which one, and
- 3) by offering the description to Pierre-Antoine Badaroux, alto saxophonist, so that he in turn can give the sound its due.

- A score?

- Yes, a score.

- And why this solo and not another?

- But why another?

In short, here's what I know about it: this solo turns over and over in my memory, often and often, to the point of being triggered in my head without being asked. In other words, it's a good reason to try and describe it, if only to find out more about it and hear a bit more of it.

*Parallel stories of alto saxophonists.*

# *Easily Slip into Another World: A Life in Music*

Henry Threadgill

with the collaboration of Brent Hayes Edwards

(Alfred A. Knopf editions, New York, 2023)

The publication, in 2023, of Henry Threadgill's autobiography (*Easily Slip into Another World: A Life in Music*, Brent Hayes Edwards, ed., New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2023) is the perfect opportunity to revisit the life and work of one of the most surprising world inventors in the jazz field, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 2016. In his presence and that of his biographer, and with the participation of three French saxophonists engaged in different formal analyses of his compositional systems: Nicolas Stephan, Pierre-Antoine Badaroux and Jean-Luc Guionnet.

Henry Threadgill himself has compared his music to an Amsterdam restaurant where there is no menu: each dish is cooked according to the whim of the person placing the order. It's true that it's easy to get lost in this music, which is as straight and zigzagging as a labyrinth. Everything is in its place and elsewhere at the same time. The binding force of Threadgill's work lies less in the observance of any particular idiom than in the use of composite materials re-cut and rearranged according to the geometry of another sound world. Scott Joplin and his much-acclaimed ragtime, paso-doble and the music of Venezuela (where he stayed), funk and science-fiction brass bands (inspired by the marching bands of Chicago's South Side in which the saxophonist paraded in the 1960s), so-called "contemporary" music from Back, Varese or Muddy Waters.... are in no way cited as such, but as recast in "organic compositions" carried by one or other of these atypical orchestral formulas (a double quartet of flutes and double basses with vocals, a septet of guitars and cellos with saxophone, trombone or French horn, two tubas, two electric guitars and drums, etc.), Threadgill's secret - recast in the same way as timbres are braided or rhythms are produced by intertwining rather than punctuation. All animated by this dynamic of swirls and fluctuations, where something is constantly sinking or emerging. Threadgill continues to renew the very approach to musical writing and "spontaneous composition". Muhal Richard Abrams called him "the magician". Henry Threadgill's music would be the music of spheres caught in the act.

*Alexandre Pierrepont*

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## Practical information

University of Chicago Parisian Center - <https://centerinparis.uchicago.edu/>

6, rue Thomas Mann - 75013 Paris

Metro line 14, Bibliothèque François Mitterrand stop

RER C, Bibliothèque François Mitterrand stop

Bus 62-64-89-132-325, Bibliothèque François Mitterrand stop

Free admission

Contact : belenose@orange.fr



## *Evening primrose and buried festivities*

With age, I'm discovering the reversibility of my instrument's bell: of course, it amplifies - I knew that - but it also collects. Let's say that from the lungs to the atmosphere, it's at work among all the megaphones of the world, and from the outside to the inside, it distills with all the stills. If, in one direction, the pavilion mechanically diffuses and amplifies, in the other, through the proper time of a practice, it receives - the funnel! - it collects and concentrates what remains: the hardly subjective yet singular sediment of a history, the drip by drip of an alcohol made strong by the hose of the most indecisive influences, often with delay, but sometimes also as a harbinger.

And there? a line in a ball, a concretion, a nodule of rock in the rock, the crumpled rag of an unwritten memory unfolding: these few notes played and replayed on the viola, insistent, for years, in intimacy, i.e. never in concert, to end up making it,

*transformed,*

*into something of a ritornello,*

*with a friendly spider on the ceiling,*

*and a little bicycle turning inside,*

*to end up finding them...*

these notes, like :

- an aphorism that turns *between a few communities,*
- a poet's adage *that's right on the money,*
- a saying *that says what it is without saying what it says,*
- etc.

... to find them there, these notes: a little piece of *Sweet Holy Rag*, in "Rag, Bush and All."

*Jean-Luc Guionnet*