

## **At La Filature: the meeting of Moondog and Bl!ndman – Counterpoint: music takes us to the highest spheres**

Moondog was a singular, rare and precious musician. He never achieved the success his talent deserved. Although he studied music in Memphis when he was young, he largely practiced it as a self-taught artist. His calling as a composer was inspired by his sister, who read him the life story of a European composer.

Born **Luis Thomas Hardin** in Kansas in 1916, he travelled widely because his father was a wandering preacher. At the age of sixteen he was blinded in an accident after picking up a stick of dynamite lying between two railroad tracks.

He was initially fascinated by Native American tribes. As a young man he witnessed a Sun Dance ceremony whose percussion deeply impressed him. He was also fascinated by Viking culture, since his father came from Scandinavia and his mother from Germany.

In 1943 he moved to New York, where he met composers and conductors such as Leonard Bernstein and Arturo Toscanini. However, his unusual clothing and Viking-like appearance marginalized him. From 1947 onward he lived on Sixth Avenue with his dog. In tribute to that dog, he adopted the name **Moondog**.

He sang, invented instruments to accompany himself, and composed music. He recorded albums and associated with Philip Glass, who said that Moondog was one of the origins of minimalist music. His influences included Native American music, traditional music, polyphony, Monteverdi and Bach. He was also connected with the jazz scene and recorded with Charlie Parker (“Bird”).

After a concert in Frankfurt in 1974 he decided to settle in Germany. In 1977 he met a student who discovered his work and hosted him with her parents. She cared for him, transcribed his scores from Braille, and supported him in his productions and tours.

In 1989 he made a triumphant return to New York, invited by Philip Glass for the opening of the New Music Festival. He lived with that family in Münster (Westphalia) until the age of 83 while continuing to compose.

He left more than **800 works**, including more than **80 “symphonies”** for orchestra, in many different styles. He collaborated with numerous contemporary and jazz musicians, including Stephan Eicher.

Interestingly, the name of the Flemish collective **Bl!ndman** has nothing to do with Moondog (despite what one might think about a guide dog). Their name actually comes from the Dada magazine *The Blind Man* by Marcel Duchamp. Nevertheless, this encounter and tribute is a happy coincidence.

The collective, founded by Eric Sleichim (after his group Maximalist!), also works in film music, dance, and contemporary music. The saxophone quartet, expanded here to seven musicians, brilliantly interprets the original music of this eclectic composer.

The pieces are small contrapuntal gems, sometimes bordering on fanfare music, rock, or repetitive loops. Unlike many jazz performances with long improvisations, these are short written pieces in which every instrument has its place. Together they form something like a polished diamond whose facets enhance each other's light.

They are minimalist and concise, often only two or three minutes long. For a concert lasting almost an hour and a half, this makes for an impressive number of pieces.

The music relies on the power and variation of multiple saxophones—from soprano to baritone—complemented by tuba. They intertwine like musical Möbius strips, sometimes resembling street fanfares, sometimes delicate baroque melodies or church choirs.

Some pieces rise in relentless crescendos that sweep the audience away, while others suspend us in gentle melodies or send us racing along at a frantic rhythm. Occasionally voices join in, like in baroque oratorios or even cartoon melodies.

There are also songs, sometimes humorous or romantic. A majestic hymn swells, or a moment of softness tenderizes the atmosphere. Drums mark the rhythm with precision, while hand drums or djembé bring a softer touch. Bells add light accents, an acoustic guitar sketches melodic lines, and an electric guitar introduces themes that the voices develop.

The musicians are multi-instrumentalists: besides saxophone and clarinet (and of course tuba), flute, duduk, and even a type of hand accordion appear on stage. A piano or synthesizer accompanies some compositions. The richness and variety of these works is remarkable.

The concert, warmly appreciated by the audience, revealed the almost boundless range of this prolific composer's talent.

As the icing on the cake, BLINDMAN performs "**Bird's Lament**", Moondog's tribute to Charlie Parker, written shortly before his death.

BLINDMAN - Moondog - La Filature – Foto's: Robert Becker









La Fleur du Dimanche <https://lafleurdudimanche.blogspot.com/2026/01/a-la-filature-la-rencontre-de-moondog.html>