



# Crawling With Tarts

by SCOTT THIESSEN of Rope

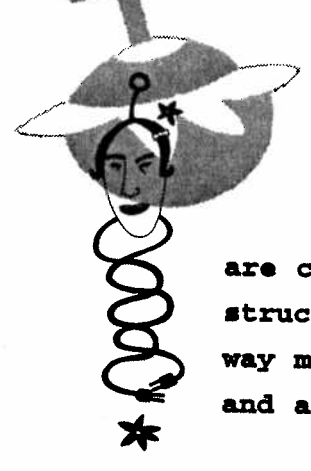
Crawling With Tarts have been making music in the experimental vein since 1983. The principal members are Suzanne Dycus-Gendreau and Michael Gendreau and often they work with guest musicians.

They have an extensive discography. Most of their earlier material was released on numerous tapes, some of which were home made. Since 1993 CWT have released four CD's and one full-length record. Their current recording projects include a 7" for gyttja records. Their music is based on a wide palette of sounds, many of which are newly created with homemade instruments, and some contain subtle sounds,

often overlooked, like the sound of rocks rubbing together. Entire pieces have been composed with electrical motors or old records. Their compositions

are created and edited by a process which has the structure "organized in some way...some illogical way more like. There's always one way to do it and a hundred ways not to do it."

1995



The following interview was recorded on an unusually hot San Francisco afternoon while searching for a park or view of the city. Madeleine their 12 month old baby was along for a ride in her stroller.

What's the purpose or goal for *Crawling With Tarts*?

Mic: Well...all it is, is the music that Suz and I make together basically...and whatever we do falls as *Crawling With Tarts*. That name came as just something we put on anything that we work on together.

So it's more than just music?

Mic: Yea that's right. It is more of a style of working...because...we've done other things like where the two of us have worked with other people and sometimes that's within our normal style and sometimes not. It does sort of have some extra meaning to it. We will know if something that we are doing has the criteria of being something that we consider to be within the realm of the world of our music.

Right now it seems you guys have a lot of releases...pop songs and some other...more experimental...do you have conflicts about that?

Suz: No...really  
Mic: No...really  
What about audiences?

Suz: I think it's more audiences.  
Mic: Some of the audience...conflict with...really interesting about...people who are into the experimental...side of our work are most likely to be intolerant of other forms of music and I find that to be ironic.

Suz: Exactly  
Mic: Where...people who like the pop stuff are more frequently interested in hearing the experimental stuff.

Suz: Right...they're much more open.  
Mic: And that's a very weird thing to me, but it is something about these people, and of course I'm generalizing, who consider themselves to be adventurous listeners.

Suz: It's...Some of the people that are...into experimental music who when they hear the pop music they go, "Oh that's so that! We only like this part of their music." But like we're not...because we try to do whatever we can do.

Mic: That...  
Suz: ...we have...a long time and...and most of those pop...

point. The point being that some people just reject, completely, that thing that they grew up with, you know that stuff they heard on the radio when they were eleven, as being a bad influence on them. And I think to a large extent it was a bad influence on us too, but we...you know we always wanted to grapple with it and understand what that influence was. It's an important part of everybody's psychology. And...uh...some people won't agree with...

Suz: It's okay to say you don't like things because it's not scientific about...there are things I don't like. I don't like the smell of tar on the roof and every time there's the neighbor to have tar on his roof...oh God. I had to leave the house today 'cause I don't like the smell.

Mic: Our neighbors put manure on their lawn the other day.

That's a bonus. How much of your work do you think is based on folk music?

Mic: A large part of it. Not on any specific folk music but we consider it to be a folk music of our own particular milieu.

Suz: Yea I think of the folk music is much more prevalent in like the living rural part of our lives...

Mic: Yea I think, I think what is meant by that question is that...is...when you take music from your environment, you take music and base it on the way you live and the way things are around you...and I think that, to a large extent, determines the kind of music you make.

Suz: That's true.  
Mic: You know not in the sense of traditional folk music like...or music indigenous to various other cultures. I don't think were influenced by that...I think that we consider our music to be indigenous to our own culture...our reflection of the way society is, in...society of ways.

...I think a lot of that comes from...instruments?

...definitely because...you know...put sounds in...the sounds that...determines...But also the...are probably based...reality.

That...[obscured]...and sounds that...go together differently...true.

Mic: At heart...music probably has a strong element...influence from...society but there's always this...laboratory aspect of it that we want to...say that that's the formal...

about last night. The motors do have a form and we do work in very strict forms.

Mic: No, I know...no the pieces that we make are very...organized. But um...but they are not organized in a normal...language, that other people use. The language is determined by the piece...and the sounds we have found for it.

You almost need to find a whole new way of transcribing for each piece?

Mic: Well we do that. Yea we write the scores. But...kind of like...in this exploration we find new sounds then we compose with the sounds and we may use some formal aspects which are not unusual, but they're not very apparent sometimes because the sound sources are unusual.

If there is talking in some of your pieces is that mostly sound oriented too or is actually what the words are?

Mic: Yea...I know this question and this is an important question. The question is...is the...is the textual component as important as the sonic element? Right?

Yea.

Mic: Is the literal meaning of the sample as important as the sound of the sample? And I think...Suz will give her own answer...but I think that we are using it as the sound rather than the literal meaning. 'Cause were not trying to recycle things, or to recontextualize old meanings.

Suz: Exactly.  
Mic: I think we're really interested in...the sort of sonic communication itself, which is more complex and carries more information than verbal communication. You know like if we take some conversation, it's just the sound of the language rather than the words being spoken...to directly answer your question. And we've done things like taken whole...we have a piece, "Flat Leaves and Mandrills" which is about 25 minutes long or 20 minutes and throughout the whole piece it's based on a conversation...a taped conversation that Suz and I were having, or...no actually...it was Suz and Scott I think. Anyway it's wholly based a conversation. But the conversation isn't meant to be heard, in fact it usually isn't heard, but the forms and the rhythms of the speech and all that to a large extent determine the other sounds we added later. So it started but with that conversation at the base, but the literal conversation was completely suppressed by the end of it. The rhythm of the conversation and the form of the conversation is retained...and...You're...

songs are old. The Madeleine CD compilation of old music.

Which were recorded a while ago?

Mic: All were recorded a while ago and Mayten's Throw, which has the most recent pop songs on it is also still at least four or five years old.

Some of those songs on Madeleine...I think the date was 1983 or '84.

Mic: Yea one of them, one of them goes back to '83.

Suz: At that time we were still doing experimental music too. It seems we were always doing both. But it did end up that for the live shows...we never did pop songs for the live shows.

Suz: We don't sing on stage...once we sang Bobby Lavender but that's...

Mic: That's right we did it once and it was at the request of the people who run on the show, but we're not very keen on it.

Suz: Yea.

Mic: Well Suz doesn't like to...in public.

Suz: No. I think that's a really weird thing to stand up and sing, and practice a song over and over again. Where when we play our experimental music it's fresh, it's current, (Mic: more ritualistic) it's made for that particular thing...where pop music is something you reoccur it and you do the same songs over and over again. It involves the ego in a different way I think.

Yea it does, it does.

Suz: I don't know how to explain it. I don't mean to be negative on it because I really love pop music and I...we all grew up on it. But for me to get up on stage and sing is...

Do you think there's anyone in the experimental scene right now who hasn't grown up on pop music?

Suz: Well...

Mic: Heh, that's a good point. I think the answer is probably no. I'd have to think about it more, but I doubt it. There could be, maybe their mother or father was a professor in music or something. It's like...who could have avoided popular culture...there's no way...

Suz: ...grew up in...who's a punk...grew up...

Suz: ...grew up in...punk...sucks...it's like...live there...That's why they know it sucks.

Suz: Exactly...but everybody grew up on pop music.

Mic: I think maybe that's a good...

aspect of music: having some reflection from our cultural milieu, but the elemental aspect is...is exploratory, it's about finding new sounds that we think haven't been...working with new ideas and...and trying to build...from nothing. Something that hasn't been done before. That's kind of the elemental aspect of it.

Suz: Exactly, you know what it is like to pick up like a farfisa, or even a guitar or something and you plug it into this and then you plug it into that and you go "Oh it's that sound again." At least when you're building instruments you can go "Oh I've never heard this before, it's a new sound!" Do you know what it's like?

...Yea.  
Suz: Some things are predictable and some things happen unpredictably, and it's the unpredictable part that blends with the other. Like if I'm playing something and Michael is playing something we can make it start working together...that's really exciting. And that can happen with guitar, bass, and drums too. I don't mean to say it won't but some things are more predictable in music like the sound of a piano or the sound of bongos. You know what that's going to sound like you can just distort it in certain ways to make it sound different but when you put a weird motor inside of a little can and you put some marbles in there or you put like something else in there and all of a sudden it starts sounding kind of weird, and then it degenerates. It starts it's own thing and it starts breaking down.

So sound is the main essential point of most of your music? The sound aspect.

Suz: Now it's more sound than music at least for me it is.

Mic: I think so...yea.

What do you mean by sound vs. music?

Suz: Well...when I think of music I think more of...um...well you know that's funny our sound-forms have a lot of shape and so does music so I don't know if it's right to say that sound is so much more different than music. It just starts out...it probably starts out the same as building music, songs.

Mic: Well music is a language and I think we're not using that language we're just using...we're building new languages for each piece. You know, when you talk about music you're probably talking about working within a...structure that exists.

Suz: ...you know what we were talking...

highlighting a part of the conversation

that's not usually heard or is not usually paid attention to...it's always heard I mean but it's not easily cognated. That's more interesting to us than to blatantly say a thing...[obscured]...more subtle. At least this is our intention.

Mic: I don't know where we are?

Oh is that way to the fire department playground?

Suz: Uh huh.

Mic: Let's go over there, that's a nice view. Really, over here?

Suz: I thought so.

We must be close to Safeway or something...here's the...just kind of dumped off the shopping carts here. Either that or they got rolled down this hill.

Yea...um do you think your music has gotten more hypnotic in a way? as far as working with just sound instead of meaning?

Suz: I don't know; some of the stuff we did a long long time ago is hypnotic, so...

Mic: Maybe the live pieces though, that's generally true of, because if you think back along the latest live pieces...I think...that's because we are working in larger forms...you know Suz?...kind of like we're taking...

making these large scale pieces...longer pieces based on simpler elements...maybe that's why they are more hypnotic.

Suz: They are hypnotic because after the show people come up and they said "Oh...you really...it changed the way I came in. You...you know...you got me kind of off track or something."

[obscured]...That's a neat thing that happens with music, or theatre, or anything else, like...That's the part I like...because...you know when you play it you can't experience it that way.

Mic: Oh wait, we're on Diamond.

Suz: Do you know what I mean? When you play the music you can't get lost in the hypnotic part. Because you...

Miss the changes?

Suz: ...you miss the changes...you know what I mean you've been playing rock music.

Yea.

Suz: So usually when I hear it back I'm surprised... "Oh is that what it sounds like?... You know we also repeat. We like certain kinds of repetition...repetition starts creating trance in a certain way.

So we've made a wrong turn?

Mic: Maybe we wanted to go up there. Where is that fire department? Is it up there?

Suz: No, I really think...  
Mic: See where we are?  
Suz: This is the way the bus comes down...sschoom...It is down there.  
Mic: Sure?  
Suz: It's kind of our neighborhood.  
**Some of your pieces seem really intimate as far as they don't seem as...they could be common things taken for granted and then you explore the sounds that they make. You know they are not uncommon things. Like you used...I've seen you use window weights, um is it...**  
Suz: The thing is about the music that you see is always what... someone says, "can you do this show," then we go downstairs and, say, my landlord took out the window weights that day, so they're sitting there and we wonder what they sound like. We've said this before; it is always current to when, what we create, since it is going to be created for that specific show, it depends what we have at hand at the moment, you know what I mean...or what actually inspires it to be sitting there.

**It's in the present.**  
Suz: It's in the present.  
Mic: The core of our music is more of an idea or a concept of elementalism and form...and the instruments that we use to make it are less important I think. The philosophical center is the most important part of it.

**Is some of it appreciating some of these sounds that are taken for granted?**

Mic: Yea I think so. Although not in a nostalgic or a preservationist sense, But in a sense of discovery...an exploratory sense... appreciating something that you've found.

Suz: That's like something that happened the time we were...[obscured]...and all of a sudden Feferone, our cat, got this little instrument or dingle or something and started pushing it all over the living room and it was all quiet and it started resonating through the room and I thought, "Wow! what a great sound!" so the next time you go, "OK, lets try to do that Feferone sound." Do you know what I mean?

**Did it work?**

Suz: Yea! we used it on Ideomotors.

Mic: The first one on the Sarajevo Center Metal Doors CD uses that sound.

**On Sarajevo Center Metal Doors you have those charts which everyone has to follow, which is a score, but the time is relative isn't it?**

Mic: That's right.

**The musicians can interpret time on those scores which can vary widely.**

Mic: That's right. It's just an index...there are relative times but they are index numbers and they don't refer to...to...what do you call it?...sidereal time or whatever it is. The time that refers to the amount of time that it takes for the planet to go around in circles.

Mic: Not sidereal time...what is it? Terrestrial time...it only refers to terrestrial time indirectly.

**Pacific Standard Time?**

Mic: Yea right but uh...they're exactly as you said: they are relative so...that piece can be played very fast or...I mean it could be ten minutes long or it could be two hours long depending on the multiplier...how you convert from the relative time to the terrestrial time. So in other words, the structure is like...the structure adheres to a sort of linear...it's a linear structure and you can stretch it out to whatever length you want. And I think that we have found by sort of playing it naturally that forty minutes is just about right for that piece. It's...hard to play...if you played it any shorter or much shorter it starts to lose its coherence and become more chaotic and if

you play it any longer it just starts to become...uh...too obvious. The structure becomes too simple. So that's...so it does have an ideal time.

**Is that always played with the same musicians?**

Mic: Well it was. We haven't played it since, I've been thinking I'd like to have somebody else, like four other musicians play it.

Suz: ...and interpret it.

Mic: But yea it has only been played by the same musicians so far. And it was written with those musicians in mind because they were people that I knew could handle that sort of score, creatively. My original thought was that it is not something you could give to anybody. Well actually...now I think I'd like to hear other people play it, people who I don't select.

Suz: This is the little park I've always wanted to take Buggy to but it's always been so uphill.

Mic: Eh...I don't even know where we are.

Suz: We're at this weird little...park.

I think this is the one that I've seen.

Suz: Can we go and sit down and rest for a little bit? Or do you guys want to keep walking?

**I'd like to sit down. It'd be nice.**

Suz: It looks like a nice little park.

**Yea this is the park that I've seen once and I've never found it.**

**It has an Alpine feel to it.**

Suz: The sounds are always first.

Mic: Because we want to know the elements we're working with. It's like...the problem with it is...someone said to me last night after the show...that the form of that piece sounded like a "Beethoven form".

Suz: Really?

Mic: Yea, and the thing...the advantage that Beethoven had was that he knew all of the sounds. He had all the sounds of the orchestral instruments memorized. Right. So all he...you know it was easy for him to compose a sonata because he knew what all those sounds were going to sound like ahead of time. Well that's what we don't have that's why...that's what I meant about us not using usual languages so we have to develop a language and that means developing the sounds. So we develop the sounds, create a new language, and then we can compose the piece.

**Oh okay.**

Suz: Oh! Look at these slides!

**Oh wow, they're different sizes.**

Suz: I bet this one's great.

**Look at those cliffs you could climb.**

Suz: This is sort of a neat place.

Mic: As long as the big kids don't throw rocks off the cliffs. I know.

Suz: Oh yea the big kids get rowdy. Look where someone spray-painted the wall. Oh there's a pelican...see that pelican thing that's Buggy's favorite. Oh I'm sorry...

Mic: There was one other point to make too but I can't remember. But I think that was the important part.

Suz: ...got structure? Form?

Mic: We got the sounds before the structure...usually...which is our usual way...and was...to make Sarajevo I was using certain mathematical constructions to develop this form, and when I was finished it was a form that I liked so that we wanted to make some music out of it. That's unusual for us. It's more academic than we are.

Suz: Where are we Madeleine?

Madeleine: weahhwehwe!

Suz: Playyyground...playyyground!

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