

# Helen Gillet

“Her playing is suffused with soul” by **John Swenson - Offbeat Magazine**

World renowned improviser **Helen Gillet** was raised in Belgium, Singapore, Illinois and Wisconsin, and landed in her current hometown of New Orleans in 2003. Gillet performs an eclectic range of concerts in New Orleans, and tours across the United States, Western Europe and Canada. She has performed at the Copenhagen Jazz Festival, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, French Quarter Festival, Kennedy Center, Italy’s Mirano Otre Festival and more. She has three self-released albums: “Newton Circus” (2009) by her French chanson band Wazozo; an instrumental jazz album “Running of the Bells” (2011) by The Helen Gillet Trio which received a four star review in Downbeat’s October 2011 issue; and “Helen Gillet” a solo album (2012) which combines Gillet’s singing, cello improvisation using loop pedal, electronics and piano. Her 2013 recording projects include a live duo album with bassist James Singleton (October 2013) and the sequel to “Newton Circus” with her French big band: The Wazozo Zorchestra projected for release December 2013.



Cellist Helen Gillet has drastically altered the state of New Orleans’ creative and improvised music scene — for the better.

By **Jennifer Odell - Downbeat Magazine**

Gillet is a familiar face in New Orleans’ experimental jazz scene, and her first New Orleans-recorded album, last year’s “Running of the Bells,” mined that far-out vein. But she’s a hard player to pin down; as capable as she is of discordant improvisation, she’s equally adept at more traditionalist styles, like the Continental chansons and pop songs she often performs with her protean project Wazozo.

“Helen Gillet” speaks a language (in English and in French) more familiar to popular music fans than “Running of the Bells,” with her playing recalling the intensity and grace John Cale brought, with viola, violin and cello, to recordings by the Velvet Underground and Nick Drake. The efforts of Drake and Cale, in fact, might be Gillet’s closest analogues; repetition, drone and just a little bit of atonal skronk couched in ardent, beautifully crafted and complete meditations that burst with sentiment.

By **Alison Fensterstock, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**

Gillet threads her tri-continental childhood web into her performance, notably with the instrument she picked up at age 9: The Cello. Her training is rooted in western classical cello, North Indian Hindustani vocal ragas, free improvisation, New Orleans Jazz, funk, and country rock and French chansons. Recent collaborations include working with James Singleton (bass) Tim Green (sax) and Doug Garrison (drums) and her french Chansons band “Wazozo,” and with countless other musicians such as Hamid Drake, Evan Christopher, Leroy Jones, Carl Leblanc, Michael Ray, Almut Kuehne, Rob Wagner, Cassandra Wilson, Frank Gratkowski, Washboard Chaz, Mark Southerland, Marianne Faithful, Ed Sanders, Georg Graewe , Lynn Drury, Wardell Querzergue, Doctor John to name a few. She has three self-released albums out *Newton Circus* (2009) by her french chansons band “Wazozo,” instrumental jazz/medieval album *Running of the Bells* (2011) by the “Helen Gillet trio” which received a four star review in the October 2011 issue of Downbeat magazine and her latest self-entitled solo album (2012) which combines Gillet’s singing and cello improvisation

using loop pedal, effects and piano and the studio artistry of Kansas City master sound engineer Chad Meise. Her 2013 projects include a Duo Album with James Singleton (bass) and the sequel to “Newton Circus” with her french big band: The Wazozo Zorchestra.

WORDS about “Running of the Bells” by the artist Helen Gillet:

I have been an improvising cello player for over ten years now and this is my first self-produced album that shows my abilities to let loose on my instrument.

I decided to start this project off by inviting an audience to my living room in the musician's village to hear Doug and Tim and I play.

I had George Ingmire record it with two high quality room microphones. The session sparked a concert series in my living room for both local and out of town guests. I then booked a full day session at Piety Studios in the Bywater with Mark Bingham and Wes Fontenot as our engineers. We recorded a full day session then took a break and came back for another live recorded concert in the studio.

I sat on the recordings for 6 months listening and editing and then did the final edits with Wes Fontenot at Piety. Although we spliced a few things, most of the cuts are raw and true... the way I like my music to be! I feel like I am exposing the sound of my cello playing that has evolved over years of improvising with amazing musicians in New Orleans.

It is the first time I have used the vielle and distortion on a released album and a premiere of my work on the loop pedal and with the wonderful talented Tim Green and Doug Garrison. I have used looping and distortion in live performances throughout new orleans and when I tour to other cities for several years. It is my second self-produced record and definitely very different from the first. There is no singing - it is a purely instrumental album. I was

inspired to add the medieval thread by Willie Ruff, a bass player but also a french horn player that played with Dizzie Gillespie. He recorded a solo french horn album called "Gregorian Chant, Plain Chant, and Spirituals" Recorded in Saint Mark's Cathedral, Venice. Because I play a cello in jazz settings I relate to the french horn being an "other instrument" (i get a kick out of being nominated in the "other instrument" category along side banjos, washboards and theramins in the Offbeat magazine). "Tribute to Ruff" on the CD is a dialogue between the vielle and the conn-o-sax. Tim Green plays this rare instrument that had been designed for orchestral playing but phased out of production. Another track called Tourdion is a french medieval song I learned from a Swedish cello player at the New Directions cello society festival in 2001. It has polyphonic vocal parts which Tim and I play instrumentally on cello and conn-o-sax while the vielle drones in the background.

I was also very influenced by silk worm threads which made there way onto the cover thanks to a fabulous picture of silk threads by German Microscopic photographer Anja Hartmann.

The "running of the bells" title came out of my living room concert. I encouraged the audience to share their reactions to Tim Green, Doug Garrison and I improvising and someone said "running of the bells" after one tune where Tim Green was playing the bell tree. During the Piety recording studio sessions a few months later I used the material I remembered from that song and we recorded the title track song that appears on the album.

I have worked with Tim and Doug since the early 2000's in New Orleans in bands such as James Singleton's 3 now 4rkestra, Jonathan Freilich's Naked on the Floor and countless small improvising combos with local talent and visiting artists. Tim and I recently performed together with the Mardi Gras Indian Orchestra and Doug Garrison and I recorded the new Happy Talk album together and have played in Schatzy's band as well as with the Alex Macmurray band.