

# David Fiuczynski: the mind of a headless torso, by Arturo Mora

Guitarist and composer, leader of Screaming Headless Torsos and Punk Jazz projects, co-leader of KiF and collaborator for many other projects involving Steve Coleman, Cuong Vu, Greg Osby, Me'Shell Nge'deOcello or his wife Lian Amber, David "Fuze" Fiuczynski is an artist which track must not be missed.

Fiuczynski is currently in the middle of a Screaming Headless Torsos European Tour which will bring them to various Spanish towns, including Madrid (March 19), Mataró (21), Girona (22) and Hospitalet (23). Arturo Mora had the chance to interview Fuze via a questionnaire. This is what he said:



*David Fiuczynski*

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**Arturo Mora:** First of all, thank you for your time. How's the current tour going?

**David Fiuczynski:** Incredibly! We are having a great time and the vibe and the music has been phenomenal. We are really happy with the lineup and the direction the band is going. The music is a lot more funk-rock-punk-rap than before, and the

audiences have been really digging it, and so have we!

**Arturo Mora:** Your music obviously entertains, but it can't be considered plain entertainment, as it implies a transgressing attitude (a typical art feature) that may force a determined reaction from the listener. Where would you put your music in the balance between art and entertainment?

**David Fiuczynski:** I think all art is entertaining, but it's also emotional and spiritual. That's different from entertainment, which sometimes contains elements of art. I would like to consider my music art that entertains. I hope I have the transgressing attitude!

**Arturo Mora:** Do you like to consider yourself a guitarist, a jazzman, or just a musician?

**David Fiuczynski:** I consider myself a musician and composer, who plays guitar. I come out of the jazz tradition, but really I am just a musician who uses the guitar to express himself.



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**Arturo Mora:** The title of one of your records, "jazz punk", is also an expression you've used to describe yourself ("a jazz musician who doesn't want to play jazz"), as well as the name of a tune by the great Jaco Pastorius, someone who also lived on the edge of jazz and other music styles. Do you think your

way of approaching music has something to do with Jaco's? Would you place yourself close to him stylistically speaking?

**David Fiuczynski:** I admire Jaco very much, and in a bigger sense, I approach music the same way, in that I am trying to push the boundaries of the canon, but it is stylistically very different.

**Arturo Mora:** You were born in the USA but grew up in Germany. Has this been definitive in your way of approaching music (a cultural crossover enforcing a musical crossover)?

**David Fiuczynski:** Yes, this has given me a much more international perspective, something I notice now more than ever with the current Bush administration and the ignorance that reigns in America. The crossover also comes from listening to my German father's classical records and my African-American mother's jazz records. Growing up in two cultures has definitely affected my music, in that I've been exposed to some things that I might not have been had I grown up in America – German Expressionist painting, Nina Hagen, Kraftwerk, Neue Deutsche Welle, and other things that I never would have been hip to had I been living exclusively in America.

**Arturo Mora:** When you've been asked about your writing process you've usually talked about "groove sandwiches" ("current grooves as the base, rich harmony in the middle and intense singing or wild to soulful soloing on top"). Do you always start from a groove, or are there times when a melody or a harmony is so strong that it becomes the base of everything?

**David Fiuczynski:** I sometimes start from a harmonic sequence or a melody. The sandwich could start anywhere, with the bread, the mayonaisse, or the filling. It really depends on how inspiration strikes and that is always different.



*David Fiuczynski*

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**Arturo Mora:** Improvisation may be a way to approach the writing process, a vehicle for soloing, a bag of resources for special cases or whatever the musician uses it for. What part plays improvisation in your different projects?

**David Fiuczynski:** Improvisation plays a big part in all my projects. Ideally, it is the development of stated themes from the melody, just like in a symphony. More and more these days, I'm striving for through-composed compositions, although I often rely on the players to provide the development instead of writing every idea out note for note. This gives us the opportunity to interpret new ideas every night, even though we are playing the same tunes and using the same melodies as starting points.

**Arturo Mora:** When you start working on a tune, do you know which of your projects will you use it for beforehand, or do you take that decision as the arrangement evolves?

**David Fiuczynski:** I usually plan ahead in the style of the project I am working on, but I often have five or ten tunes that I am working on simultaneously. I figured out my writing rhythm which is to work on a composition as far as it will let me, then at times I may let it go for months, even years. Eventually I or maybe even it, will get around to being finished.

**Arturo Mora:** Regarding Kif: pentatonic scales are common ground for many different Eastern musics, as well as for blues, rock and jazz. Have you ever used the pentatonic scale as a starting point for your work in Kif or do you prefer to start thinking in more abstract terms?

**David Fiuczynski:** I use pentatonics for riffs and also East Asian melodies. At some point I would like to do a record which mixes African and Chinese music, because they are both very pentatonic. Besides that I usually think from a harmonic, rhythmic or melodic starting point. It's not as abstract as people think.



*David Fiuczynski*

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**Arturo Mora:** You've experimented microtone playing with fretless guitars, which may be hard business for someone used to think musically from the Western tonal approach. Was it difficult to face microtone playing? What feelings do you get when trying this approach?

**David Fiuczynski:** Approaching microtones has not been that difficult for me because I would always warp melodies with the whammy bar. Now it's just more of an attempt at a more precise approach. The feeling I get from microtones is either from Eastern music, like Arabic or Turkish music, for example, which is intensely emotional and spiritual, and the microtones

sound like “Eastern” blue notes to me. Also, Western microtonal harmony gives me a whole new palette to work with.

**Arturo Mora:** As said below, you consider yourself a “punk jazz”, and you lead projects for which you use a band name, instead of your own name. This seems to be the opposite of what everyone could expect from a musician with your enormous ability to create music, and someone able to be considered a “guitar hero”. Do you consider yourself kind of an “anti-hero”?

**David Fiuczynski:** I’ve always been a very collaborative musician and I have been fortunate to work with very strong musical personalities like John Medeski, Dean Bowman, and Rufus Cappadocia, for example. In the Screaming Headless Torsos, all the musician supplied material and were a part of the ‘band’. I also just loved the energy of the name. In the future, I will be putting out some cd’s under my own name.

**Arturo Mora:** One of the projects you perform in is your wife’s, Lian Amber, which stylistically differs from your other projects. Do you get any feedback from her way of approaching music?

**David Fiuczynski:** My wife has had a big influence on my music. She’s a wonderful singer, with a full rich voice and I’ve learned a lot about phrasing from her, especially phrasing behind the beat, and saying more with less, editing and focussing only on the essential, and world music. She’s also constantly kicking my ass! ☐

**Arturo Mora:** You have experience as a jazz teacher. Please give us your opinion on an always controversial point: the level of jazz education in contemporary music schools.

**David Fiuczynski:** The level of education at Berklee College of Music is very high, with incredible, world reknown faculty. I graduated from New England Conservatory, and the education one can get there is also very rigorous and complete. However,

those are really the only two institutions that I have spent enough time at to really comment on.



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**Arturo Mora:** Frankly speaking: what music do you enjoy the most: rock by Jimi Hendrix, Steve Vai or Frank Zappa, or jazz by John Scofield, Bill Frisell or Pat Metheny?

**David Fiuczynski:** I enjoy all of these, and punk by the Bad Brains, classical music, Indian music like U. Srinivas, Vietnamese guitar by Kim Sinh, and so much more. I listen to a lot of music but I don't really listen much to guitar players at this point. My wife also has 4000 vinyl LP's of world music, soul, funk, jazz, reggae and everything else you can think of and I am slowly working my way through those.

**Arturo Mora:** You've always admitted influences from past musicians. Is there any current musician that you really feel influenced by?

**David Fiuczynski:** These days I am analyzing aspects of different music. There isn't really one musician, but I can give some examples – beats by Timbaland, Rodney Jerkins,

quartertone harmony by Julian Carrillo, Turkish, Indian and Vietnamese melodic embellishments. These ideas aren't really specific to one musician, but are elements that I am incorporating right now.

**Arturo Mora:** Please tell us about your current projects and what's to come in the short term.

**David Fiuczynski:** In April I am recording the next KiF CD with Steve Jenkins on bass and Skoota Warner on drums, and that will be released in Fall 2006. The new Screaming Headless Torsos lineup will be recording later this year as well, and we will be touring in Brazil and Argentina in the summer and Mexico in the fall. I'll also be back in Europe in the fall of 2006 or spring 2007 with KiF.

**Arturo Mora:** Thank you and best regards

**David Fiuczynski:** And thank you for your support and interest!

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