David First: The Magic Resonances

Charlie Morrow interviews David First

Charlie Morrow: This is Charlie Morrow speaking for Immerse. Today's guest is David First. David First is a many sided composer, musician. He's played in Dead Cheese, a hippie guitar band in his youth, performed with Cecil Taylor in Carnegie Hall, produced many records of minimalist drone music, some of which were released on Phill Niblock's XI label.

He's played in rowdy bar bands, and many others. led the no wavish band the Note Killers, which had a significant influence on sonic youth. And he's even conducted a mummer's string band in various Philly parades. The village voice once described him as a bizarre cross between Hendrix and Lamont Young.

Think of that. He's performed at most of the avant garde's hallowed halls, including the kitchen, Bang on a Can, Central Park, Summer Stage, The Knitting Factory, Tonic, The Deep Listening Institute, CBGB's, as well as De Ijsbreker in Amsterdam and many festivals throughout Europe. Other projects include working with the sonification of the atmospheric phenomenon known as the Schumann resonances, and human brainwaves, and other esoteric projects such as the western hemisphere, a drone, and micropulse acoustic electric ensemble.

I first met David first at Phill Niblock's loft back in the 20th century. And we kept on meeting mainly there. But more recently we played a concert together. He has a project called Dave's Waves, which began in Europe and is currently in Brooklyn, where he offers a menu of sounds in what is an actual cafeteria that hasn't been operating as a cafeteria.

It's an artist club these days. But it's a very special approach because it creates an informal listening arrangement for people to listen to. It'll get involved through the menu and also just the community that is drawn to that kind of experience. It was a great experience to play there. He and I also recently visited our friend Gerd Stern, a friend of Phill Niblock's and Gerd's in his nineties.

He's a multimedia artist and a poet. And we had a visit with him together in Manhattan. So our relationship is growing and I'm very pleased to have him as a guest on Immerse.

I'll start as though this was the beginning of the show. I'm very pleased to welcome you, David, first to Immerse. I'd like to start out by asking you what your first immersive experience was. What do you remember?

David First: I define immersive as perhaps The first time I realized that there was a bigger universe than my daily life, something that, something cosmic, in a certain way.

My clearest memory of something – I'm from Philladelphia, but my family moved out to Denver, Colorado for my father had some work out there, and we used to take day trips and these were always pretty fantastic day trips. To the grand Canyon, to Royal Gorge, to the

Painted Desert, all these incredible, lunar surfaces and places where it was like nothing else on earth, but the one that trumped them all, that I have the clearest, most vivid memory. And the first time I remember like hearing, not even hearing, but experiencing and witnessing the heavens open up was we went to where the asteroid collided with the earth out in Arizona. Are you familiar with that?

Charlie Morrow: No. Tell me.

David First: It's near Winslow, Arizona. I know that. And it's outside of any town, but there's this huge place where this asteroid crashed into the earth I don't know how many millions of years ago and created this huge crater. Meteor Crater. That's what it's called, Meteor Crater, not Asteroid Crater. I remember just having this cosmic experience where we were driving back and I started realizing, okay, there's more to life than this daily thing I've been living.

I was five years old. So I didn't have the widest view of what it meant to be living at that point; I was just going about my business like most little kids. I think I was living a fairly normal life, but I felt like everything changed with that. I remember going back and sitting in the back of my parents car and just like looking up at the sky because it was dark by then.

I can't even really put it into any kind of like physical experience. It was more just like imagining the heavenly choirs and stars were all twinkling and it was very clear that. Something had shifted in my perspective on life with that.

Mira and I went back there. It was somewhere in 2016 or 17 to see all the things that I remembered, but for me, it was like a pilgrimage. I wanted to go back to this Meteor Crater and experience it again. They always say, you should be careful what you try to revisit. It was still a very interesting place. It was very cool. But now there's a souvenir stand and people give lectures, and they built out this whole infrastructure around it. When I went there in the late fifties it was much more underdeveloped and therefore maybe a little bit more ... trying to think of the word, like it had this whole aura about it because it was so alien. Once there's people giving like paid tours and t shirts and mugs and, it's a little bit less spiritual on some kind of level, I don't know. But it was still interesting to go back and see it once again – my old friend, the Meteor Crater. It wasn't like at that point I decided to devote myself to anything. I think I went back to normalcy, at least for a few more years. But that was, I think, the beginning of looking beyond, or the intimation that there was something beyond daily life.

Charlie Morrow: I can imagine in such location you really could see how far up was up. Suddenly you're in touch with it. It just continues going up.

David First: And whenever you think about that, it just becomes so ridiculous. What we go through here what we fight over, what we're working hard to accomplish, all that just becomes like, what are we doing? I don't know what the answer to that is because, it's not like we can just join up with the rest of the universe. Some people would say we can.

Charlie Morrow: It's a very sweet thought. You have a kindly nature and positive spirit.

David First: I had my moments. I think of myself as a sociopath with a heart of gold.

Charlie Morrow: That sounds very elevated. Of course, since that time you've made your practice in sound. How you might connect what you're doing now to such an opening-up experience, or if there is a connection

David First: At some point I started out like a lot of kids of my generation, just, getting involved in rock 'n' roll and playing guitar and writing songs and in a band in high school and, but I think about this a lot, my generation and yours too, we're not that far apart. I think we experienced the beginnings of something that the generation before us – there's no way they could begin to understand. Just because of the chemicals that were being invented that we were playing around with. We were on our own in a certain way. There was nobody to go to for advice or guidance or anything, because our parents had no reference point for it, we became like another creature in a certain way. Do you know what I mean?

Charlie Morrow: I do.

David First: The whole psychedelic revolution that I came up during and survived and thrived as a part due to, I think we took on challenges. I don't want to romanticize it. Every generation has their challenges and our parents faced probably even more difficult ones, but this particular one, this one that involves, I dare I say, exploring our minds and trying things and going places that they couldn't imagine.

And it probably scared the hell out of them, I think. Although we tried to keep it as down low as we could. But that became a large part of the musical search. And I started loving anything that had that kind of expanded sense of time. Expanded sense of tonality, music from all over the world. That was another thing that we were possibly one of the earliest generations to be able to experience. Recordings from other cultures that were readily available.

Charlie Morrow: The sonic world had been studied and recorded and sound was following.

David First: Yeah. Today you can hear, at the touch of a click of a mouse, you can hear anything from anywhere at any time. And it wasn't quite like that. You had to go down to your local record store and risk spending a couple of dollars on something.

Charlie Morrow: That's true.

David First: But at least we were privy to it all. And I was right there in it, I just loved it. I don't even know what it was that attracted me to these – there's no other way to say it – drones and minimalist tendencies.

I think it just came along with the territory. That first generation of psychedelic musicians rock, the psychedelic rock musicians. Most of them had to give up the ghost after a few years because you can't really stay there in that certain way, I think. But I stayed attracted to that notion, or that feeling, even more than a notion. And when I felt like that had come to some kind of end, I was lucky enough to or open enough to begin a step into what I considered the next inevitable step in my particular definition of psychedelic music, which

was the more the freer jazz movement. I found that was something that was like a next step in that whole idea of immersive, going all the way out as far as you could go sonically, physically.

There was a great meeting between the physicality of it and what those sounds that would be created out of taking it to that furthest edge that you could reach that was appealing, to somebody such as myself. And I just, I'll use the word, immersed myself in that for a few years, for sure. And I loved playing it. And that was the beginnings, I would say, that takes me up to my early 20s.

Charlie Morrow: When you say playing it do you mean on guitar or what instruments?

David First: Yeah, that was still guitar. I found ways that I felt were analogous, that I also felt were a bit unique, to be honest, and I really got into that.

Charlie Morrow: I'm sure it had your unique musicality in it. You're always you, and evolving you and you have a certain musical understanding, a way of hearing and a way of making sound that forms a practice.

David First: I used an expression that I came up with in my mid-twenties for my band at the time, the Notekillers. Same animal, different cages.

Charlie Morrow: Nice.

David First: I've applied it to a lot of things since then, because I feel like it's always the same agenda, same experience that I'm looking for, but it's just wrapped in a different package. And that goes for whatever instrument I'm playing, whatever genre I might be exploring at the time.

Yeah. At some point I realized the only thing I really wanted to study was me. I know that sounds self-centered and I guess it is, if you want to be an artist, you spend time exploring, of course. Your precursors, but at some point I realized, okay, I don't want to spend my life worshiping my heroes, although that's part of it, but I wanted to, dare I say, become one of my heroes.

That sounds what else can I say? If I, if not now, when, and if not me, whatever that expression is. I just felt like I wanted to, it was all or nothing, you try to do that with as much humility as you can muster, but that's the goal. That's the only goal that felt worth it to me.

And in a certain way, that's why I left that world of free jazz behind. It was almost because I honored it so much that I felt like, okay, the people who I admired and idolized and bought all the records didn't feel like that was possible to become one of them in that music. It just didn't feel proper to a certain extent.

They had already done everything I could imagine doing. And I just felt okay, if I'm going to honor whatever my I don't know what a word to use, heritage, I had to find something that was uniquely me. And that was and I started getting involved with more electronic music at that point. And then I formed my band Note Killers, which was a rock band, a three piece instrumental rock band that I played guitar.

And I felt like for whatever it's worth, And even ever since, I've always played around with the idea that whatever I do, I'm a rock 'n' roll musician. That's where my sensibility lies. And that's really what got me a ticket into the side door of like even playing free jazz. I had studied some jazz theory, some jazz guitar for a couple of years with an amazing legendary musician named Dennis Sandoli. I don't know if you've ever heard that name. He's a South Philly legend. He was a New York legend. He was known all over. He played with a lot of big bands, but he retired at a certain point and devoted his life to teaching, including as the story goes, John Coltrane, which was what at first attracted me to Dennis.

And I studied with Dennis and I was devoted to the lessons with him, but I never thought of myself as a jazz guitarist, and I never even wanted to be a jazz guitarist. I just liked the theories and the expanded harmonic sense and the idea that it would improve my technique for whatever. I was a little bit lost at that point, to be honest.

I don't know if I even knew what I wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to expand my vocabulary. So I studied jazz guitar because that seemed like the next logical step and to study with somebody. Dennis was unique in the sense that he was all about your creativity. He wasn't trying to make me into a bebop jazz guitarist. So he was the one who suggested I buy the Herman von Helmholtz book *On the Sensations of Tone*.

Charlie Morrow: yeah, I knew about that book. There was the Dover English translation.

David First: That's right. I still have that copy pages fall out whenever I open it up, whenever I open it up. But it still has a lot of meaning for me and I've consulted it since.

Charlie Morrow: There's a lot in there. Even crazy stuff like flame speakers.

David First: It's so amazing that book, the fact that he was doing that all with mechanical devices; there was no electricity, there were no oscillators.

Charlie Morrow: No *electronic* oscillators ...

David First: Exactly.

Charlie Morrow: Because clearly if you had a hose with water going in it, you could modulate it.

David First: Very true. Yeah, of course, Pythagoras experiments didn't include electronics either.

Charlie Morrow: Not those kind, there's been recent excavations that showed that voltaic cells were used. In the ancient markets of Greece and such because it was used for plating metal. So they had actual electric cells. The general purpose of it was to transfer metal ions onto the surface so that you could gold plate or silver plate on the metal surfaces. But they definitely were messing with electricity early on.

David First: Wow.

Charlie Morrow: But for a practical reason – to make, so to speak, more valuable objects.

David First: Sure. Anyway. Yes, it seems to be I'll send you a link to it. It's about how artists are always the next to start to mess around with any scientific convention for their own purposes.

Charlie Morrow: That's interesting.

David First: It'll come to me before the end of this, hopefully. It's Doug Douglas Kahn.

Charlie Morrow: Oh, I knew him.

David First: Yeah. Yeah. You continued from there.

Charlie Morrow: You continued from those guitar lessons and having such an extraordinary teacher who opened your mind up at the same time as not nailing you down to one particular style to play.

David First: Yes. He, I was already starting to play around with microtonality a little bit. I had Discovered Harry Partch and that Charles Ives quarter tone album that came out on some budget label, but there was quarter tone piano pieces.

Charlie Morrow: Maybe it was on Folkways.

David First: Eh, could have been. I'm not sure, Odyssey or one of those labels.

Charlie Morrow: Oh yeah.

David First: And that was an ear-opener to the idea that, okay, when you come up playing guitar, and especially at that point in the history of the evolution of guitar playing, it was all very blues based still, so there was always this notion that there was something beyond fretting the notes straight on. There was this whole tradition to draw upon of bending strings.

Charlie Morrow: Right.

David First: So that was always part and parcel of the musical vocabulary. So the idea of micro tonality, formalizing that idea, calling it something wasinteresting.

Charlie Morrow: It was always there, but giving it a name and focusing on it ...

David First: In fact, I did a paper for *Leonardo Music Journal* a few years ago on Muddy Waters.

Charlie Morrow: Oh, wonderful.

David First: I picked the one song that turned out afterwards was his favorite song which kind of blew my mind, "Long Distance Call."

Charlie Morrow: Oh, yeah.

David First: And for part of the paper, I analyzed a couple of his. Now he didn't bend strings he used the other method for achieving the subversion of the, the tyranny of the frets, you might call it, he used the slide, which was the other way to do it for those blues musicians, and I frequency analyzed what they call the blues third.

And I analyzed two of them from two different parts of the song and in both cases, he nailed the six five, the ratio of the minor third in just intonation right on it both times, it was pretty interesting to find out. So the idea that you could actually calculate the blues always fascinated me, too. I always wanted to understand things from both extremes, the intuitive study of feeling. And, the mathematics that could go into that.

Charlie Morrow: What was the mathematical framework of the blues that you're referring to?

David First: The idea that the blues third could be codified. It was the blues third, which is a 6-5, which is higher than the equal tempered minor third. So you can't find it on the instrument. You have to find it by bending. I have no idea what they called these things. I don't think they had the vocabulary. They called it the blues third or something such as that, but it was something that was passed along somehow from musician to musician, from town to town. And that became part of the new vocabulary of music for players and of all types ever since. Whether you're talking about jazz musicians or blues musicians, a lot of Lamont Young's early pieces had blues in them. Connotations.

Charlie Morrow: Yes, they did. Wasn't he a sax player?

David First: Yeah. Yeah.

Charlie Morrow: He used the idea of putting his fingers, over the holes in such a way that he could do the equivalent of bending pressure also.

David First: Yeah, of course. Yeah. embuchure explorations.

Charlie Morrow: He's a fascinating character, focusing on your growth, and it's interesting how you pass through these various communities without losing touch with them, but continue to have respect for them and then grow your own wisdom.

David First: That has its upsides and its downsides. I always feel like I can relate to a lot of different qualities, which is very helpful in exploring how to bring things together. I always feel a little bit like an outsider though because of that as well. But, that, that comes with the territory, I think. I can certainly relate to you, Charlie. I'm sure there's certain ways we also part ways, but there's enough common ground that we can communicate. So that's all I look for.

Charlie Morrow: We played nicely together.

David First: Oh yeah, that was beautiful.

Charlie Morrow: Yeah, I think that there's special frets in the air.

David First: Haha, true enough. That was what I love about that certain you're not that much beyond me in age, but there was a certain generation of people that were. I really related to when I first moved to New York whatever was going on was not something that I necessarily couldn't do, which was like a lot of free improv kinds of stuff.

But the people that I felt resonant with were the Phill Niblocks, Alvin Luciers, people such as you and Meredith Monk and Pauline Oliveros and I felt more attuned to that than I did to the ... Every generation always reacts to the one before. So it's almost inevitable. There would have been a corner turned by the time I got to New York.

But I think when I first met Phill, I felt like, I think he was tickled by the idea that here's this ... I wasn't a kid at that point I was probably in my late 20s or so early 30s even, but I was 20 years younger than Phill and the idea that somebody was exploring things that he could directly relate to I think he enjoyed and I enjoyed of course finding Phill.

Charlie Morrow: Well, he was such a nurturing soul.

David First: Definitely.

Charlie Morrow: He had the capacity and he relates to so many people's work and by the way he could see it and curate it, often made people aware of looking for those things in common. If Phill puts us all together there must be something there. I always felt from the very beginning I first met him when he came to a chanting with brass ensemble piece that I did. Gordon Mumma was playing saw with Carol Weber, it was called "Spirit Voices."

And it was based on a Tibetan shaman's journey. And there was Phill, I couldn't believe it. This was in the old Kitchen before it became the Kitchen. It was the Kitchen of the Broadway Central Hotel. Hermann Nitsch did an event there with cow carcasses. The place was being hosed down in order to make it habitable. It was the stench. We were just there because I think my concert date was moved in order to remove the cow stench of Nitsch's. Rhys Chatham was also there.

David First: What was Nitsch's last name? Pardon?

Charlie Morrow: No, Nitsch, it's his last name, N-I-T-S-C-H, Hermann Nitsch. That's lost to man. He's an Austrian extreme installation artist, really extreme.

David First: Sounds like it.

Charlie Morrow: If you consider smell and the presence of dead meat as performance elements, I mean that talk about the blues third. Yeah, that's what you mean, that's Nitsch. Interesting reading about him. He has a whole museum dedicated to his work now. Austria.

In any case, Phill could relate to what I was doing. And he said: would you like to do a concert at my place? And so I wound up performing in his place as one of the first artists in his series. And that my concert there was one of the very first of what became The Kitchen.

I don't think there was more than a handful of people. So, I was right, that was a strange moment because Rhys Chatham was there. Rhys was a teenager at the time. He was quite interesting, he was working as a harpsichord tuner, so he was obviously into the power of various tunings. He was tuning all the time.

He could do mean tones, tunes, he could do a variety of harpsichord tunings, but he was able to hear larger and he was at that point exploring multiphonic singing. And so he was

listening to the tuning of his own head. So he was quite the unusual teenager. Yeah, and there was Phill. I think the fact that he remained very steady. He showed up in Vermont here on a bicycle. He was capable of long-distance cycling and just extreme. I remember him on his bike. Yeah. There was no way to hold him back.

David First: Yeah. And getting back to what I was saying about our parents: So, of course, you were lucky you had your parents, your support, at least until a certain point in your teenage years. And then, like I said, I felt like I was on my own. Even if it wasn't a physical reality of being on my own, there was still this sense of, okay, I have to figure things out myself from here on in. With some help of some peers and some influential books. Okay. My point was that when I met Phill and I always thought to myself, I always considered Phill my New York father because he took over. It was okay; this is the person that's going to show me the ropes from here on in. And he did that for me and many others till the day he left us.

Charlie Morrow: He's still doing it. He just happened to move his spirit to another location.

David First: That's very true. That's very true.

Charlie Morrow: What do they say? It's your good deeds that remain behind forever. And he was a man of good deeds. There's so many things about him that were something and he was always buttoned up about the way he did things. He was a remarkable person.

David First: I didn't listen to your podcast with him until after he passed and it was an unbelievable experience. I'm so grateful that you did that because it's like having Phill in the room with you to listen to that. It was hard to listen to at some points because it almost gave you the feeling that he was still here. By listening to that, you can create that illusion for yourself if you want. So it's a very valuable thing you did there. I'm so glad to hear that by capturing him ... I don't know when exactly you did that, but ...

Charlie Morrow: it was two different interviews and ...

David First: But it was recent?

Charlie Morrow: Yes, very recent. It's also though ... I don't know, maybe you haven't met bart who works with me, bart plantenga. He montages the shows and the scoring of them. He's a radio guy and a poet. He lives in Amsterdam. He lived in New York for many years.

David First: His name sounds familiar.

Charlie Morrow: Yeah, his parents brought him and his brother to New Jersey from Holland. When they were little kids. And so he grew up in the US and then he went back after he'd already been with WFMU. Was a book editor and performed in the East Village with poets and stuff. He has a very lovely writing style. He's written books of lists and studies, books on yodeling, I think you'll be fascinated by it. I think all of these characters had the capacity to listen as well as to make sound. And there's something about the listening and making sound. If I could drift off the subject just for a moment, my mentor and inspirer is Jerome Rothenberg.

He's still with us. He's living in California. He was born December 11th, 1931. But we've done everything. We made New Wilderness Foundation together. I was his sideman. I've played music with him throughout, since we met way back in the 70s. And I had to write what I thought; Bart is very good. So he said: what do you think is special about him? How did he attract you and what got you to be having this lifelong thing? And I said because he listens and hears and makes sounds. And there's something about that when he's writing and creating his work in this circle of listening and hearing and creating. And it was what I wrote down. I thought that's what happens with Phill – you could see it in his films. He had this patient eye and he had this patience with observing.

David First: Sure. And as long as we're talking about mentor, the mentors of mentors. I've visited Gerd Stern a couple of times in the last year.

Charlie Morrow: I'm so glad you did, he's a friend.

David First: And yeah, I know. And he's, we've talked about you and the connection. Boy, I don't know how it could happen, but he's still very lucid and everything, and he's five years older than Phill was. He's such a trove of information and ideas and history and it's unbelievable. And, of course, that all came about because I asked Phill once over the summer, How's Gerd, 'cause I hadn't seen him around, he said. You should go visit him. I took that as my marching orders.

Charlie Morrow: We'll visit him together.

David First: That would be unbelievable. I'm sure he would love that.

Charlie Morrow: I would like to really talk to you about Dave's Waves, the equipment that you had, and what made this a unique take and it's a very authentic take and it's almost like you were introduced to the world of electronics by knowing a TV repairman as a child.

David First: Oh, okay. So you know a little bit already. That's good. I don't know where to begin with that. The origins of Dave's Waves: I decided I wanted to study brainwaves a little bit for this. I was asked to do a sound installation in this exhibition in Belgium. And I decided I wanted to do something based on brainwave states.

I had been looking things up and I discovered there was the idea of formalizing things that I was intuiting, I liked creating beating tones by having a hard panning on each side of your head. I started reading about it and I learned that there was a whole – I don't even know if I want to call it a science. I guess it's a science. It's definitely a science. Everything co-opted by the new age side of things becomes a pseudoscience, but I enjoy that too. But they're, binaural beating and all of that. So I started, exploring that. And then I discovered this phenomenon called the Schumann resonances. And I befriended a geophysicist who enjoyed what I was telling him about what I was doing. He started sending me a live feed of the Schumann resonances that he was analyzing and measuring out in the outbacks of Fairbanks, Alaska. But I decided for this installation, I wanted to try to have some fun with it.

Yeah, it is a way of tricking people. I wanted to see if I could get your, dare I say, average, non-experimental music aficionado to sit and listen to something and experience it without prejudice and without fear, which is the main thing, because I think we do this to people.

We explorers of sound or explorers of art or theater or whatever, maybe we don't mean to, but we're shrouded in this ominous kind of separatist attitude and I wanted to see if there was a way I could get a true reaction out of people. That would bypass all of that so I created this thing this sonic restaurant called Dave's Waves and we had a nice logo on the window of a so-called restaurant that I had set up.

We had tables and I had a menu and people had at that point – this was like the early two thousands and the only way I could do it at that point was to burn discs and have these drone pieces that I created using Shuman residence data and brainwave data, frequency data, and I would burn these pieces I created onto discs and put them on Walkman discs with headphones. And I got such an amazing response. It was just exactly what I was looking for. People walking down the street. Of course, the organization that was sponsoring the exhibition also had their people there. But what I was really interested in and hoping to encourage was the people walking by. They'd just say, what is this? It looked like some kind of restaurant. And they would come in and have a true experience. They would experience it without knowing what they were going to experience, which meant they weren't afraid. Or, at least, if they had any fear of walking into a strange place and put headphones on, they were immediately put at ease by the menu, which was all humorously worded.

And I did it a few times in different cities, European cities, Berlin, there was one in the Netherlands, one in Moscow, but I never thought I could do it in New York because, when I would do it in these places, it would be for six weeks at a time, it would be part of an exhibition. I always insisted that it be in a storefront. I never wanted to do it in a museum or a gallery. Because that would defeat the whole purpose. That would be like putting parentheses around the parentheses, let's pretend we're trying to do something real in a real situation. So that would give the game away, and already prejudice people, the walk-in people, which is what Dave's Waves is really all about – the walk-by traffic.

So, I would always insist on being in a storefront. But I never thought I could do that in New York because you know how funding is, the idea that somebody was going to give up their storefront for a month or two in New York, it just seemed impossible. I never even thought to try it, but as fate would have it, there's the Sunview Luncheonette, which is, unbelievably, three blocks away from me here in Greenpoint.

It's such a magical place. It's like the most amazing thing I've ever run across in all my years of being in New York, at least. It's a former luncheonette that hasn't changed its appearance since the 1970s probably. There's a couple of phone booths in there with phones that obviously don't work, and the menu on the wall, it was like a dollar 15 for a burger.

They never changed their prices. As an actual working luncheonette, a lot of people in the neighborhood used to hang out there. The artists and musicians who populate Greenpoint.

And it was a Greek couple; it was their whole life. They started at seven in the morning and ended elevn at night if you wanted to visit them.

You went to the restaurant and that was their socializing. The husband died 2010 or 11, something like that. And Bea, the wife retired, but she amazingly bequeathed it to all the artists and musicians. And it became a social club that has fought vigorously to never become a venue, but allows different types of events to occur there.

Somehow, I forget what the situation was exactly, but one of the members, I was not yet a member, I am now a member, a dues-paying member, found out about my Dave's Waves and said, why don't you do it, why don't you do it at the lounge? Now of course, doing it in an actual restaurant is too crazy. It's crazy. It's just we always used to work really hard to make these empty spaces look like restaurants. But here I am presented with a counter and booths and all the mechanical details of a restaurant. The only thing was I had to modify my vision for it. I was not going to block out whatever was happening there for two months.

But what it did allow me to do was doing it for a whole weekend. And I actually did it for two weekends my first time. I don't know if they would have been amenable to a longer-term thing, but that was an experiment and I felt let's try this. And it gave me the opportunity to expand on the idea.

Number one, whenever I would do it in some other country, I would spend a week there setting things up, and then once it was running, the interns took over and I went home. I wasn't going to be the host for weeks at a time. There was no way that was going to be possible in my life or theirs. So I would go home and entrust it to whoever, try to explain the concept and it worked very well.

I would get reports from them and I would have a sign-in book with comments and all of that, but to do it in New York three blocks away from me meant I could be there the whole time. Two things happened beyond that, too, was that not only could I be there, but it felt like a natural extension of things.

There were never performances in these Dave's Waves that I would do there. It was a very austere situation. There was no sound at all. It was just a headphone private experience. That was the whole idea, that if people chose things from a menu, the technology moved from the Walkman CD players to iPods. That big innovation was in Berlin. And what they had to do was they had to glue them to a plate, which they glued to the tables. Because iPods weren't cheap. The Discmen, you could get knockoffs at that point. I don't think they were even really official Sony Discmen. You could get them fairly cheap.

None of them ever got stolen anyway but the iPods were, and I still have one, that was glued to a plate that has the glue on the back that I took as a souvenir. But it still had the same information on it. It was just a different medium for presenting it. By the time I did it in Friesland, in the Netherlands, the internet had gotten to the point where there was no reason to have a physical medium, or if there was, everybody had headphones at that point.

This was 2013, so, by that point, everybody had a smartphone. We provided headphones because not everybody walked around with headphones. You just sat at a table and there was a URL to go to. So, we tried to keep up with the times and we always made that, a point of pride of Dave's Waves as we were on the cutting edge of technology, but there were never performances, to get back to my point.

But when I started doing it here, it seemed first of all, I started doing live resonances, human resonance sound in the room. And by the one in the Netherlands, I had started what I call Dave's Waves cinema, which were these videos that I created using some of the same information. The same relationships, the mathematical relationships.

And it became, dare I say, a more immersive experience. So you walked in and you heard something automatically. And I created this huge sign to put up on the front of the Sunview to turn it into Dave's waves. It's been amazing. I even started serving things, and of course, when you're doing something at Sunview, there's always going to be wine and beer.

It became a much more socialized environment, which is beautiful. I just love people hanging out there and it's like your local bar at night. But instead of hearing whatever's on the jukebox, like rock 'n' roll or R&B or country-western, you're hearing Schumann resonances. That's the ambient environment that's in there.

So I started having performances and curating evenings. But the difference here was instead of just having people perform, I never turn off the Schumann resonant drones. Those drones are always on as long as the place is open. And what makes it a little bit different for the performers is that they're always interacting with those drones. It creates something that can't happen anywhere else. You can't necessarily just go to your bag of tricks. You can, but you have to relate your bag of tricks to what you're hearing surrounding you, which doesn't happen anywhere else. It's a special challenge, but it also means that something special is likely to happen that won't happen anywhere else.

And that's what we did together. As far as the instrument I play there, that grew out of my father who was not a musician at all. He liked his music. I think he liked Stan Kenton. But he was a huge cornerstone influence on everything I've done because he was an electrical engineer. As an example, I had an old Akai reel-to-reel tape recorder and I had an oscillator.

To this day I can remember how important this was. I was overdubbing sine tones and I went to overdub a second sine tone and all of a sudden I'm hearing this third sound that I knew I didn't do. And I asked my father, I said: What's going on here? And that's when he explained to me heterodyning, difference tones that open up the floodgates.

And that's all I've ever tried to do ever since. And that's where the magic is for me. And the pursuit of magic is all I'm interested in. And that is how you either do something personally interactive in what you're doing or how you interact with other musicians or how you interact with some drones you set up, whatever happens. That creates that third thing that you're not personally responsible for that is there because of what you're doing, of course.

But if you stopped doing it, two things would disappear, not one thing. That is all I'm ever looking for, is that difference tone. What can you call it? One plus one equals three.

Charlie Morrow: Dave's Waves beautiful vision. I appreciate your generous spirit and like that kind of magic.

David First: If you're not pursuing the creation of magic, let's say, to keep it a little bit more humble, there's no reason for doing it. Now, of course, there's a thousand ways to create magic. I think magic can be created simply through the interaction of performer and audience.

There's still some third energy being created. But for me, the idea of making a sound that sets into motion something that's not coming from inside of me.

My father was an electrical engineer. He showed me how to create a theremin out of the insides of transistor radios that you could use your body capacitance to modulate the sound just by touching the different components inside.

That was pretty magical. That was like something that I never heard before. He had a very experimental nature. He built TVs and, yeah, he repaired TVs. He had a curiosity that I think I got from him. Curiosity plus musical training equals hopefully something original. But he had this device; it was a signal generator that was in my house and I was so enamored with this thing I used to pretend I was piloting a spacecraft. It was just this old rectangular metal box with some really fascinating knobs and dials on it, along with that Meteor Crater story I told earlier, we're talking about the late-fifties, early-sixties.

The whole out of space thing was all the rage. I used to pretend I was piloting a spacecraft with this thing, turning the knobs. And I was so in love with the look of this thing that I carried it around New York for decades, took it with me everywhere. It was a beautiful piece of art and somehow a light bulb went off in my head.

When I started thinking about frequency and frequency ranges, I started thinking about what would happen if I dialed in the frequency range of this signal generator, which starts above the range of human hearing. The lowest band on this thing is 50,000 Hertz. What would happen if you tune the radio to somewhere around the same place? And again, magic. I started hearing the signal generator coming out of my radio. Wow, what is going on here? I love the precise control of digital. There's also something about having something that's almost uncontrollable, which is really what happens when I'm using this thing. I can do my best, but it's really beyond being able to play a repeatable melody.

I love that about it. It's the ultimate challenge of being a musician. It's riding the bucking bronco – how do you control the uncontrollable and yet feel like you're still making music. I had one other Heathkit signal generator that I bought when I lived on Canal Street when I first moved to New York.

It was like an open air bazaar every day on Canal Street. There'd be blankets with LPs and books and clothes and electronics and I bought this Heathkit signal generator just because I

liked the look of it for 10 bucks. I carried that around with me for decades and I still use that and my father's signal generator as part of my instrumental array in a room.

I've gone through many radios and I've settled on a couple of these GE super radios. They're really beautiful, they have like nice large woofers and a small tweeters. And I have an ongoing eBay alert for any time one of these signal generators, these Superior Instruments 650As from the 50s [goes up for sale]. They have these tubes. Signal generators. I have three of them that are currently operative. And I use two in performances. It's a great instrument. It's a beautiful sound. I also use transistor radios because those I can move the proximity to the signal generators and make that an instrument as well. I even use a theremin. But I only use the amplitude antenna, which also becomes a controller.

It's become formalized. It just gives me this amazing sound that like, it sounds like it's coming from outer space. There's a little bit of static noise involved. It's AM radio that I'm talking about here. So it's not the same pristine quality of sound as if it were FM radio, let alone, just oscillators inside of a synthesizer or a computer. But that adds a little bit of this eerie distance to it that I find really beautiful. I also know that there's a level where I have to accept what it gives me. And I like that about it. Controlling it is always a challenge that I take on. I don't give up that idea. So when I want to have that kind of experience, that's what I use.

There's always a level that I call gestural improvisation. It's what all interpretive musicians do. I'm not saying I invented that. What I'm trying to do is raise that to the most important detail; that's where the music lies. Period. Not just okay, you can interpret Bach your way and I'll interpret him my way. It's phrasing that to the level, the most important level of detail. The interpretive element. So that it almost doesn't matter what the note is. Because what you're looking for with that note is the most important thing. And that's a realm I think is best left up to the moment. Simply because you have no idea.

What the sound of that particular room is going to be, you have no idea on a certain level even what your instrument is going to be capable of that day, what your physical nervous system is going to be capable of that day. Another musician in that same group that you're playing with is going to be up to at that particular moment. There always has to be this variable, in a boxing match. Everybody has a plan until you get hit in the face. And then everything after that becomes an improvisation.

Charlie Morrow: This has been an amazing excursion into the essence of Dave's waves. I feel like we were at a good place to leave the listeners with lots more to think of in their heads. Is there anything that you would like to say in conclusion?

David First: I don't know. We did cover a lot. We covered a huge amount.

Charlie Morrow: I think it was all quite good. One completely, I think, related question. It seemed to me that Mira plays a very important role, and I'm wondering how her listening and her reactions all fit into your growth as a musician because you have a great sharer there, a very empathic and thoughtful, bright person, walking, doing this life dance with you.

And I wondered if you could speak a little of how that has maybe affected what you're doing.

David First: Mira is first of all, she's the most loving person I've ever known. But on top of that, she's the perfect combination. She's not a musician, but she's tuned into music beyond the capabilities of most musicians I know.

And to have her feedback is scary sometimes because she will tell the truth. Thankfully, the truth is more often than not something I'm happy to hear, but there's always this scary moment at the end of a performance when I look up to her and she provides the ultimate feedback for me because I'm prejudiced. She's outside of it enough to have a clearer view of it than me sometimes. And to have her give me the thumbs up is what I pretty much always need to know for sure that something is working. She's the life partner that I never even imagined.

Charlie Morrow: Thanks for sharing that. I think at this point, thank you very much for sharing so much of yourself and for all of your work. I've been very pleased to be there with you. Let's say goodbye for now and to be continued.

David First: I can't wait. To be there with you means being in the same room with you. That would be great. Let's face it, now or soon, let's say.

Charlie Morrow: Yes, now or soon. We don't know. I'm all for now or soon.

David First: Okay, great. This has been fun, Charlie.

Charlie Morrow: My pleasure. Bye now.