

Los Angeles Filmforum and Black Editions present
Filmforum 50, program 8: *Step Across the Border* featuring Fred Frith
And the world premiere of *The In Between*, featuring Shelley Burgon
Sunday, February 8, 2026, 1:00 pm
At 2220 Arts + Archives

Los Angeles Filmforum is the city's longest running organization dedicated to weekly screenings of experimental film, documentaries, video art, and experimental animation. 2026 is our 51st year. www.lafilmforum.org

Black Editions Group includes Black Editions and Thin Wrist Recordings. Thin Wrist is a post-genre artist's press dedicated to producing new works by artists whose works push the bounds of musical forms, and includes Shelley Burgon's "The In Between". <https://www.blackeditionsgroup.com/>

Back in the mid-1990s, Filmforum presented two beautiful music films by the duo of Nicolas Humbert and Werner Penzel, *Step Across the Border* and *Middle of the Moment*. These two films remain in the memory long after viewing, with their unique approaches, captivating performances and adventures, humor, and gorgeous visuals. We're delighted to present a sneak preview of the restoration of *Step Across the Border*, which follows the musician Fred Frith in a variety of deeply absorbing interactions with other musicians, artists, family and friends. Filmed from 1987 to 1990 in rich black & white film, it is a fantastic portrait of the extended improvised art music world of the time, with other musicians such as Joey Baron, Ciro Battista, Arto Lindsay, René Lussier, Haco, Kevin Norton, Bob Ostertag, Zeena Parkins, Lawrence Wright, and John Zorn, and that world's intersections with artists working in other forms. The film is an inspiring look at the life of a working musician of the time, with Frith, around the age of forty in the years of filming, already internationally renowned as a musician seeking creativity where possible. We have the unique opportunity to talk with him reflecting on the film and the thirty-five years that have passed.

Multi-instrumentalist, composer, and improviser **Fred Frith** has been making noise of one kind or another for more than 50 years, starting with the rock collective Henry Cow, which he co-founded with Tim Hodgkinson in 1968. Frith is best known as a pioneering electric guitarist and improviser, songwriter, and composer for film, dance and theater. Through bands like Art Bears, Massacre, Skeleton Crew, the Fred Frith Guitar Quartet, Cosa Brava, and the FF Trio he has stayed close to his roots in rock and folk music while branching out in many other directions.

Shelley Burgon is a harpist, composer and sound installation artist who creates ambient and abstract music using graphic notation, indeterminacy, electronics and sound sculptures. She studied extensively with Oliveros at Mills College where she received an MFA in Electronic Music. Burgon's chamber music has been recorded by the Ne(x)works ensemble featuring the vocalist Joan LaBarbara. Her most recent work *The In Between* for solo harp was released by Thin Wrist Recordings in July 2025. Shelley's music has been commissioned for film, chamber ensembles and choreographers, most notably by The Merce Cunningham Dance Company for their Hudson Valley Project at the Dia Beacon.

As an ensemble member, Burgon is sought after for her vast experience as an interpreter of new-music and the classical avant-garde performing the works of Pauline Oliveros, John Cage, Butch Morris, Morton Subotnick, Cornelius Cardew and most recently performing with the Long Beach Opera and Wild Up. She has performed at institutions such as the Whitney Museum, MoMA, Walt Disney Concert Hall and Lincoln Center and has recorded harp for various artists ranging from Bjork to Anthony Braxton. She has recently released a duo record with the guitarist Fred Frith.

Screening:

The In Between

Directed by Nicole Valencia

2026, digital/16mm, color, sound, 21 min

World premiere of new film featuring Shelley Burgon, Fred's collaborator and co-performer on Saturday night.

Recorded on location at Meditation Mount in Ojai, California, *The In Between* features an experimental harp performance composed in seven-minute movements, each followed by moments of the harp at rest as environmental sounds are brought into focus. The film moves between close attention to the artist Shelley Burgon and the surrounding landscape, balancing intimate detail with a wider sense of place. Designed to be experienced as a meditation, the work invites sustained listening and presence, grounding sound and image in the shared context of land, sky, and time.

Step Across the Border

A ninety-minute celluloid improvisation

By Nicolas Humbert and Werner Penzel

1990, 35mm transferred to digital, b&w, sound, 90 min

Sneak preview of new restoration!

Musicians

Fred Frith, Joey Baron, Ciro Battista, Iva Bitová, Tom Cora, Jean Derome, Pavel Fajt, Eitetsu Hayashi, Tim Hodgkinson, Arto Lindsay, René Lussier, Haco, Kevin Norton, Bob Ostertag, Zeena Parkins, Lawrence Wright, John Zorn and many others

Special Appearances by Robert Frank, Julia Judge, Jonas Mekas, Ted Milton, John Spacely, Yasushi Utsonomiya, Tom Walker'

In *Step Across the Border* two forms of artistic expression, improvised music and cinema direct, are interrelated. In both forms it is the moment that counts, the intuitive sense for what is happening in a space. Music and film come into existence out of an intense perception of the moment, not from the transformation of a preordained plan. In improvisation the plan is revealed only at the end.

One finds it. The other connection concerns the work method: the film team as band. Much as musicians communicate via the music, our work, too, was realized within a very small and flexible team of equals. What mattered was exchange. And movement. Sometimes we started filming in the middle of the night, responding to a new idea that had arisen only minutes before. We had a fundamental feeling for what we wanted to do, for what kind of film this should be. And we followed that feeling. It was all very instinctive...

Do you know a white rabbit who, playing trumpet, circles the world on his flying carpet?

Maybe you have met him somewhere already, in Zurich, London, Leipzig, Tokyo or New York. That at least was about the route we took and what resulted from it was the black-and-white wink of an eye at the symphonic connection between subways, storms and electric guitars.

Also starring: several telephones, puddles, scarecrows, saxophones, orchestrated cities and motors.

A music film.

Directors:

Nicolas Humbert, born in 1958. Swiss filmmaker. Early writings, pictures and Super-8 films influenced by French Surrealism. 1982-87 studied at School for Film in Munich. Since then has worked as a freelance writer and film director. Founded the film production Cine Nomad together with Werner Penzel. Films include: *Fog Chasing* (1985), *Wolfsgrub* (1986 – Public Award Filmfest Munich), *Step Across the Border* (1990 – European Film Award), *Middle of the Moment* (1995 – Prix la Sarraz for Innovative Cinema), *Vagabonding Images* (1998 – Jury Award New York Film festival), *Three Windows* (1999), *Why should I buy a bed when all that I want is sleep?* (1999), *Brother Yusef* (2005 – Prix Cinéma Suisse), *Lucie et Maintenant* (2007), *Wanted! Hanns Eisler* (2012), *Wild Plants* (2016), *Floating Islands* (2023).

Werner Penzel (1950-2024) played in a rock band and wrote poetry in the 60's before turning to moviemaking in the early 70s. Worked with the Brazilian theatre company “Oficina/Uzyna” in São Paulo, studied at the Munich Film Academy, traveled through South and Central America, Amazonia, North Africa, India, the USA and Japan. After producing and directing *Vagabunden Karawane* (1980), *Adios al Odio* (1986) and other movies, in 1987 he established the production company “CineNomad” together with Nicolas Humbert, to collaborate among other movies in two works for cinema, *Step Across the Border* (1990) and *Middle of the Moment* (1995), the film-triptych *Three Windows* (1999), the films *Why should I buy a bed when all that I want is sleep?* (1999), *Not Like Before* (2005) and *Brother* (2006). In 2006 he constitutes “Laboratoire Village Nomade” together with friends in Switzerland to do research and exchange with artists from Europe, USA, Asia, Palestine and Israel, resulting in the installations *In Praise of Shadows* (2007) and *I Love You I Kill You* (2008). In 2009 he moved to the island of Awajishima in Japan to establish the cooperative “nomadomura” together with Ayako Mogi, creating the installations *One Day* (2011), *Walking on Sound* (2012), and the movies *While We Kiss the Sky* (2016), *Zen for Nothing* (2016).

Los Angeles Filmforum screenings are supported by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles. This activity is supported in part by the California Arts Council, a state agency. Learn more at www.arts.ca.gov. We also depend on our members, ticket buyers, and individual donors.

Coming soon:

Feb 12 – Co-presenting “The Love Tapes” by Wendy Clarke, at the Philosophical Research Society

Feb 15 - Filmforum 50, program 8: An Evening with Morgan Fisher, At 2220 Arts + Archives

Memberships available, \$40 Student \$75 Individual, \$125 Dual, or \$225 Silver Nitrate

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