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Music in Germany – Panorama

In the Heat of the Network: the C3 Festival



The C3 Festival in Berlin, Essen and Danzig throws light on the current crossing of styles in "serious" and "popular" contemporary music. The result of this acclaimed experiment opens artistic borders.

On the right side of the stage stands Sebastian Meissner. In recent years the Berlin laptop musician has produced not only subtle electronic albums but also playful House records. On stage he wears a heavy winter jacket. He leans over his laptop and imperceptibly nods his head. Meissner plays somber beats and erratic loops and samples, whose origins get lost in the repetition.

On the left side of the stage stand the four musicians of Kwartludium, an ensemble for contemporary music from Gdansk and Warsaw. Kwartludium otherwise works with the complex scores of young composers such as Dariusz Przybylski or Frank Zabel. This evening the musicians seem to have forgotten themselves. Their lips pushed slightly forward, their eyes squeezed shut, they improvise wildly. The border-crossers mimic the electronic material or enrich it with reckless noise-sounds.

Musical improbabilities

That Meissner und Kwartludium should appear together on the stage of the Berlin club Berghain is a musical-historical improbability of the first order. At first glance, they have little in common. But if you look more closely, you see that a network of possible connections between the House producer and the avant-garde ensemble has long since developed. Meissner, for example, has sampled several works of New Music. Many of his CDs no longer have anything in common with the conventional understanding of pop music. The Kwartludium Ensemble, on the other hand, demonstrated its aesthetic openness when, in 2011, it issued a CD together with two "human beatboxers", that is, with vocal percussionists who are otherwise at home in the world of hip-hop and usually work with "phat beats" rather than intricate pianissimo rhythms.



The concert with Meissner and Kwartludium took place in November 2011 as part of the C3Festival. "C3" because it is about "club", "contemporary" and "classical" music. "Exploring the undefined in contemporary, classical and electronic club music", explains the Festival program, which thus puts its finger on a sensitive spot in the current music scene. For many musical works can no longer be described by the hitherto familiar categories of "classical" or "pop" music.

Organic symbiosis

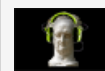


The efforts of artists to combine various musical styles used to be called "crossover". Today the term is already inappropriate because such border-crossings are no longer a willful construct but rather arise quite naturally from the biographies and aesthetic focus of the artists. When the avant-garde composer Jorge

Sanchez-Chiong accompanies his intricate rhythmic instrumental pieces at the DJ's desk, this is a completely organic conception. At the C3, Sanchez-Chiong appeared with two bass recorders as the Trio ESJ. Turntable and recorders blend seamlessly into one another. No clash of musical cultures, but rather a symbiosis that develops as part of the musical communication.

For several years now, projects such as Trio ESJ are no longer a rarity. Classical instrumentalists are looking for collaborations with electro wizards from the club scene. Together with Manuel Göttsching, for instance, the Zeitkratzer Ensemble, an established New Music ensemble from Berlin, has re-arranged his legendary album E2-E4. The

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ensemble from Berlin, has re-arranged his legendary album E2-E4. The Baroque orchestra Elbipolis appears with the post-punk electronic musicians Brezel Göring. The Berlin Academy of Ancient Music has had Ignaz Schick remix live Händel on the turntable. This is of course also an attempt to renew and update the traditional repertoire. "The record industry is struggling to find a new audience for classical music", said the British producer and remix specialist Matthew Herbert recently, analyzing this development after he had himself just re-worked a Mahler symphony in a studio for the industry.

Synthesizer – software – studio

When it comes to building bridges between what used to be called "serious" and "popular" music, electronic storage media have played a decisive role. The rapprochement between youth pop culture and the middle-class avant-garde initially took place primarily in the field of electro-acoustics, because the synthesizers and the software used by both avant-garde composers and bedroom producers are pretty much the same. Established techno greats therefore name composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen as important influences.



This is not affectation but rather recognition of the pioneering achievement of the musical avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s. A recognition that has extended into the sound design of the present. The many pseudonyms under which Marcus Schmickler has made recordings are a prime example of this development: Pluramon, Wabi Sabi and Param, but also under his real name. Schmickler studied composition, but never lost sight of the discursive potential of club culture.

Hooked on club culture



Two things – C3 also made this clear – should be borne in mind. For one, tonality and rhythmicity are still the mark of a definite musical sphere: those who today make music in the major scale or in 4/4 time are certainly closer to pop culture than to the avant-garde. On the other hand, border-crossing as such is not a gain.

In the 1980s Rondo Veneziano and the disco track Hooked On Classics also crossed borders, but did not therefore make important music history. Nevertheless, a festival such as C3 shows that the scene as a whole is in motion. And that oppositional categories such as "serious" and "popular" music are becoming, at least from the artistic point of view, more and more superfluous. This too is an aesthetic result of club culture.

*Björn Gottstein
works as a freelance journalist about contemporary and electronic
music. He lives in Berlin.*

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*Any questions about this article? Please write to us!
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[Website of the C3 Festival](#)  

[The Berghain, well known club in Berlin for every kind of electronic music](#) 

[Website of the Kwartludium community](#) 

[Essay about Techno and New Music](#)  



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