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Berlin's 'C3' Brings Classical Underground

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By [Rebecca Schmid](#)



The musical group Victoire, features Missy Mazzoli, composer/keyboardist, Olivia De Prato, violin, Eileen Mack, clarinet, Lorna Krier, keyboards, and Eleonore Oppenheim on double bass. (Stephan S. Taylor / Artefakt)

Berlin would seem the obvious candidate to occupy the cutting edge of developments exploring the common ground between electronica and contemporary classical music.

The city boasts a techno music culture still colored with the anarchy of the city's post-wall years; a new music scene envied for its experimentalism and generous state funding and elegant converted industrial spaces that lend themselves perfectly to everything from DJ events to sound installations.

Yet despite a scattering of classical lounges over the past six years, the German capital has largely overlooked the current generation of artists who seamlessly cross boundaries between concert fare and underground beats.

The C3 (Club Contemporary Classical) Festival, which opened in 2009 and returned for its second iteration this year, from November 23-26, hopes to change that by providing a platform for today's "post-classical, neo-contemplative, electronic spiritual movement," in the words of Artistic Director Jennifer Dautermann.

The festival, held at the Radialsystem and the techno club Berghain, featured performer-composers, DJ-multimedia artists and electro-acoustic musicians representing the omnivorous appetite of artists from New York to Gdańsk, Poland, where C3 travels next. It also had an outpost further south in Essen, Germany.

As classical music redefines itself in an age of pervasive digital technology, waning interest in the codified structures of the concert listening experience, and seemingly limitless genre bending, the program revealed a fearless terrain where the boundaries between minimalism and dance beats, chamber music and drum machines, dissipated into thin air.

The results were as mesmerizing as they were unsettling. Opening the event was Pierre Jodkowski, a DJ, multimedia artist, electronic music innovator and composer known for his dark explorations of sex and violence, as well as complex soundscapes that immerse the listener in cinematic drama.

The audience sat casually on beer crates in the cavernous concrete space of Berghain's main floor as Jodkowski opened his montage with a short film of driving down a highway that moved forward to minimalist electronic beats. Chirping birds, scraping hollow drones, and samples followed before the pianist Kai Schumacher was lit up in blue to perform Jodkowski's "Serieblanche," a meandering mixture of clusters, dark-hued impressionist textures, and trilling that yielded to a loud-pitched scream.

Ripping electronica, ambient sounds, and projected images of nature ushered in the final scenario involving a sex hotline, a woman named Lola, a knife and pillow talk that should best be confined to the walls of Berlin's hallowed weekend getaway (it may not be for nothing that Jodkowski performed in the same venue where drugged-out clubbers apparently have a scheduled opportunity to urinate on each other). The bee swarms emanating from the surround-sound system after the climax had several listeners twitching.

Fortunately, Arandel—a self-described anonymous multi-instrumentalist who revealed himself as a spinning, grooving, falsetto-singing, saxophone-, flute- and piano-playing male duo—transformed the atmosphere with 1990s New York-style dance beats and sparse tonal fare that had most people off their beer crates by the end of their show.

While the mystery man's claims to a reworking of Terry Riley's seminal minimalist work "In C" remain more plausible in concept than execution, the set created a pulsating world of sensuous techno and, at its best, free, lyrical entertainment.

Closing C3, the Radialsystem hosted a solo appearance of Kai Schumacher and the German debut of "Victoire," an all-female band founded by keyboardist-composer Missy Mazzoli that brought a taste of New York's thriving indie-classical scene.

Mazzoli's meditative, post-minimalist style is undeniably its own brand, with unforced, ethereal textures blending electronica and instrumentalism. Yet the

The neo-baroque keyboard melody and the violin's searching counterpart in "The Diver" revealed the wealth of Mazzoli's talent; one almost wished she had indulged herself more in instrumental lines with other numbers. The guest appearance of singer-composer Lisa Bielawa brought little charisma to the stage despite her rapport with the group.

On piano, toy piano and live electronic, Schumacher offered tight, highly-disciplined interpretations of works that played with the interface between performance and technology.

Keith Kirchoff's "Overdrive" convincingly blurred the boundaries between the sounds emanating from a Macbook on stage and a chiming toy piano, while "The adventures of Norby" grew wearing as electronic whirring yielded to tapping on a closed piano and hitting the floor with drum sticks.

The Dutch composer JacobTV's "The body of your dreams," featuring samples from weight-loss campaigns—"it's so easy, no sweat"—interwoven with saccharinely optimistic piano chords provided a window into the witty possibilities for composers today.

Schumacher, telling the audience that he's actually a rock musician, offered an arrangement of a song by the metal band "Slayer" as an encore.

If the evening carried one message, it was that classical musicians no longer allow themselves to be labeled. And in a city like Berlin, where the counterculture continues to hold its own against the bourgeoisie, the ground may be more than fertile for new seeds to be sewn around the ivory tower of the avant-garde.

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