

bernhard günter: interview for XERXES, tokyo

Q: your music is very quiet & nearly unconscious sounding (i hope i got your meaning right). when i'm listening to your music, sometimes i feel a kind of fear for my identity, because silence represents death to me. what makes you choose the quiet sound & what concepts do you have in your music?

A: well, these days, most music is very loud & repulsive, it generally transports some sort of advertising for itself, some merchandise, or for things as they are in our societies. everything is louder/ faster/ more pressing on our perceptive senses... i absolutely hate that, because it is not music/art, we're talking about... i feel that music should be there for us without violence, with an dependent reality, independent of words/concepts, shortly, without anything that refers to language. this independence of the listener & his "identity" (ego) is what you feel, what makes you afraid, i guess... this music does not care about the listener, it is there, & you can listen to it, witness it's existence, feel it's development, etc., you can draw your own type of profit from it... i adhere to the ZEN idea that "identity/ego" are just an illusion. if you give up that illusion, who then is going to die, or have to be afraid of death? i will give you an example:

crescent moon
bent to the shape
of the cool

haiku by kobayashi issa (1763-1827)... how about taking this as a kind of koan & asking you: is your ego in this? be VERY careful about saying yes or no...

now my music is just there, it does not aggress you, you do not have to listen if you don't want. to me it is like an offering... i want it to be like a tree on a field: it is not there for me (who's that anyway?), but i can still look at it & feel/think a lot of things... my concept for music is to stay away from concepts & any similarity between language & music. you may know my collaboration cd "un ocean de certitude" with ralf wehowsky (a.k.a. RLW) - the title "un ocean of certitude" aims at language, which is exactly that for us... i chose it, because in the back of my mind it means: this ocean we will have to dry up... if found it on an advertising wall in belgium, & it was supposed to make us buy a certain car, by the way... my concept thus is to destroy language based concepts... i want a "sound world", which exists by itself - don't be afraid, just go in and listen around in it... you may find it profitable.

Q: what do you call your music? crawl unit has coined the term "new abstract sound" for his experimental noise sound.

A: i call my music "music" (had to think about it a long time, first hesitated wether or not i was "still music" - then i thought in my heart it said "of course it is, plus, it doesn't matter what one calls it...") - plus, without wanting to hurt joe colley, whom i have met & who is a nice guy i really like, the word "new" is one of the worst you can choose for anything... i still listen to "new music" that's 70 years old, see? plus: how new is "new"; does it make eternity longer or shorter?

Q: i'm interested in your live performance - how do you play when you perform? & how was US live for you? i'd like to know about the audience, too...

A: well, when i "perform", i set up my equipment - in europe at least the very same that i use for composing 2 speakers & 1 poweramp (all by german company GLOCKENKLANG, a DAT machine by TASCAM (DA30) plus a cd player (that i try to borrow from someone, because my own cd player somehow gets crazy over my own stuff & plays strange things that are not what i made...))... i play DATs & CDs... my main job is to set a the speaker in the right places, which may take up to 2 hours, since my stereo setup must sound like a "sound place/territory", in my compositions, every sound/event has an exact place in space... then, i sit either face to audience (in half-padmasana on the floor, with my things in front of me on the floor) or in the first row with the audience & push the button for a piece to play (all by itself, i you wish)... in between the pieces, i let people ask questions if they feel like it & try to explain as far as words can describe what's up... in the US, it was at first very difficult to get the right equipment, since what i have is all very high end... we didn't really get anything, but then a guy who used to play bass with john mc laughlin trio, kai eckerhardt, was reminded to me

by the guy who builds the glockenklang equipment... he has the same system i have for wonderfully detailed bass playing... i called him up (we had done a promo-tour for glockenklang together once), & he agreed to let me have his system for my time in the US, because he was in germany at the same period of time in germany with billy cobham... so that was goog, i got a good sound, although his system was a bit older than mine & just a bit less refined... the audience was, as most of the time, divided by the experience of hearing my work, but mostly, we had great responses, & i got mail (e-mail & snail mail) from the states by people congratulating on my performances...

Q: what do you think of the relationship of silence & sound material? where do you get all the many sound materials: field/electronics/computer sounds?

A: what is the relationship between light & shadow? for me, silence is one of the sound materials, like for many painters, black is an important colour... most of the sounds are recorded by me at home, fed into my sampler and/or computer & treated so that they are not (well, the least possible) recognizable... many things you have heard, you wouldn't believe what they originally were... but there's no quiz, see, if you could recognize the sounds, you would find words & concepts in your head... whatever you think you're hearing, doesn't matter, let the words go, forget them...

Q: i think your music has an extremely digital sound, but i feel a human warmth in it... since when have you been in digital sound?

A: well, the digital medium gives me: 1. large frequency range (i use from about 15Hz to 18KHz), 2. an acceptable (almost) dynamic range, can be very, very soft or real loud, plus silences can be set to digital zero & thus, be real silences (digitally speaking, because silence, in our times, almost does not exist, if it ever has). the warmth is in there, because that's the way i use the digital medium, from the choice of equipment to the decisions when treating the material... i am not particularly interested in "digital sound" but analogue equipment of that quality could be impossible to pay for me... digital sound is a concept that generally does not mean more than that your sound is cold/sharp/aggressive/& mostly flat, drowned in superfluous reverb (i use NO effects)... let an old man (41 in february '98) leave those things to the techno guys. my job is to have a sort of wordless conversation with my material to see where it wants to go, some equipment helps, some doesn't... i do not have much (1 sampler, 1 macintosh computer w/protocols (4-tracks) & digidesign AM II card, two dat machines, & an old ATARI mega 4 running a sequencer as a kind of notebook), but everything is good quality... that's it...