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“MUSIC AS DATA” – MATTHIAS KRANEBITTER



Matthias Kranebitter (c) Igor Ripak

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[Matthias Kranebitter](https://www.musicexport.at/artist/matthias-kranebitter/) (<https://www.musicexport.at/artist/matthias-kranebitter/>) is one of the most radical Austrian composers of the younger generation. His works penetrate deeply into reality. They are inspired by our digital environment – the speed and intensity that affect our strained bodies and slowly restructure our perception. Shilla Strelka talks to the composer about his passion for collecting, remix aesthetics, frequency ranges and “fantastic noise”.

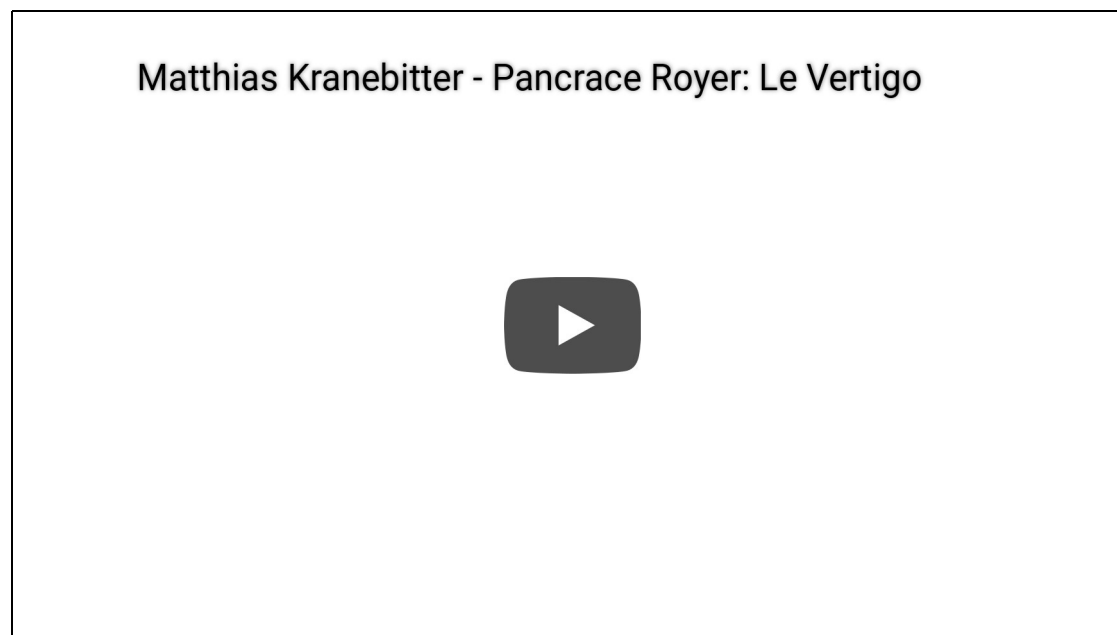
You are taking a very eclectic approach in your compositions, adding elements from different eras and contexts to each other or deconstructing existing languages. What is the motivation behind this?

Matthias Kranebitter: I can no longer believe that the material will still develop in today’s postmodern age, so I see my artistic work as a re-contextualization of what is already available. You could also call it deconstruction, yet it’s important for me to emphasize that I don’t perceive this process as being destructive, but rather as a very constructive one. So it’s not simply the destruction of already existing material, but the creation of new contexts – of a new syntax. Also, in my usage of electronics I never work on sound synthesis, i.e. on the creation of new sounds, but

exclusively in a sample-based way – i.e. with short sound recordings from which I then weave my dense textures and gestures. This creates a distinctive and new sound language, I think, even if the raw material itself is nothing new, but on the contrary consists only of existing material.

Could heterogeneity be understood as a statement in your case? Zapping between different channels, remixing as democratization of individual, partly diverging elements?

Matthias Kranebitter: In my musical creations, from the beginning I've actually been very much interested in the anorganic, the heterogeneous and the divergent. In Mikhail Bakhtin's art theory, these are all aesthetic aspects of carnivalization – as well as the dissolution and relativization of hierarchies, democratization and familiarization, which I also intend to achieve by including so-called "trash material" in my works. The simultaneity of the irreconcilable, pluralism and contradiction, these are all very current concepts for me, that are incorporated into my work.



What enables you to acoustically translate our environment, the doubling of speed and the overstimulation? Thinking in terms of historical materialism, this would mean gaining knowledge. Which kind?

Matthias Kranebitter: To believe that actual social change can be achieved through composition would be naive. When I'm composing, I want to deal with the world that surrounds me, with themes that are current for me, and of course it's a matter of being overcharged. Even when I go to a concert, theater or cinema myself, I'm not seeking a shelter, but rather the unreasonable (demand).

But I am also interested above all in psychological or psychoacoustic phenomena in connection with the information overload. For example, the "clustering illusion", the property of our brain to give meaning to random patterns that inevitably appear in large amounts of data, to perceive shapes or to hear voices that are not present at all.

In my composition "*polychotic listening tasks*" I'm dealing with dichotic listening, a psychological test in which you are simultaneously confronted with completely different acoustic signals in order to test your selective perception, or with the so-called cocktail party effect, i.e. the ability of our brain to suppress noise and extract individual sound sources from a dense sound mixture.

I do believe that you can gain insights about yourself and your perception in the whirlpool of the information overload, but of course this differs from person to person. I'm personally interested in it, and that is why I deal with it in my work. But I don't see it as a duplication of everyday life, because in everyday life we don't have the peace and quiet and time to pay attention to ourselves and our perception in the way we can in a concentrated concert situation.

This is a completely different experience then.

DECODER ENSEMBLE / Matthias Kranebitter - stack overflo...



Since your aesthetics reflect our changing perception, you are not afraid – as an almost logical consequence – to integrate advanced technologies and newly developed software into your compositions. Is this natural use of digital tools in some ways a prerequisite for a contemporary composer?

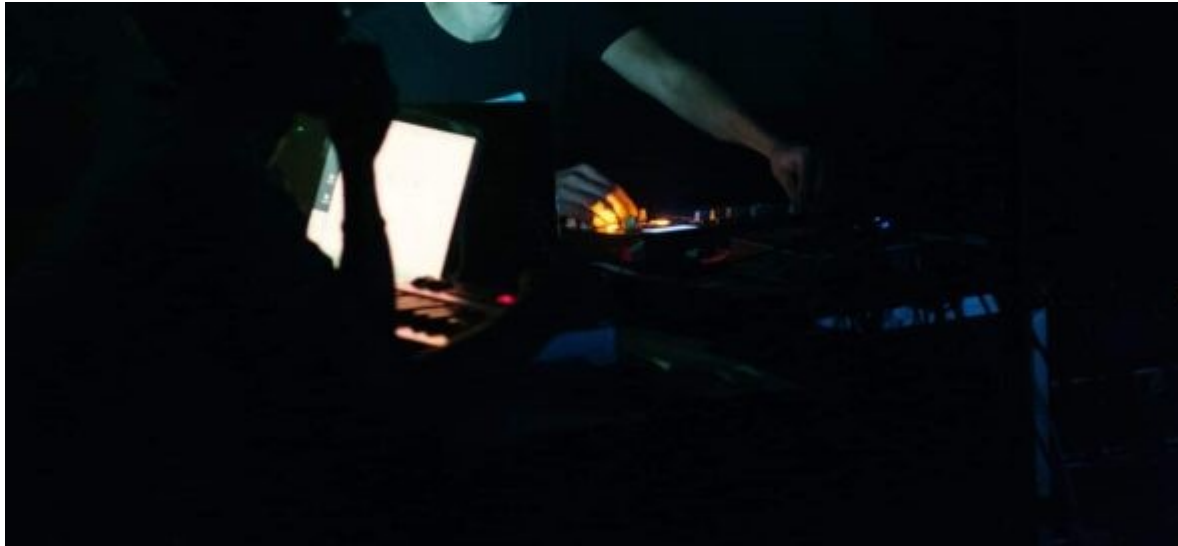
Matthias Kranebitter: I have experienced that learning to use a new software can have a very inspiring effect on composing. Suddenly, new paths open up, new possibilities and thus also new thoughts of one's own. You could also say "the limits of my software connote the limits of my world". In this sense, I'm trying to constantly educate myself in this field whenever possible. In everyday professional life this is sometimes a bit difficult, because you constantly have to work on composition assignments and there's only a limited amount of time for taking the risk of diving into something completely new. But I find this extremely important for my work.

Like Iannis Xenakis, Conlon Nancarrow or Tony Conrad you have a background in mathematics. To what extent does scientific thinking influence your composing? Can interdependencies be identified?

Matthias Kranebitter: Mathematics do play a central role in my composing, because I use algorithms to generate both the electronic sounds and the musical material for the instrumental parts in my pieces. Especially in the starting process of a piece or when searching for material, when experimenting around, inspiration often comes from mathematical models – for example, to test how different probability distributions sound in dense textures or which function curves provide attractive sound results when controlling different musical parameters. Nowadays, you can calculate results extremely quickly with any computer and then quickly discard them again with a clear conscience. In the end it's the sound result that counts, mathematics are always a tool for me and not a concept. It helps a lot to control chaos, and especially with large sound masses, stochastic operations are indispensable.

"I AM INTERESTED IN DISTURBANCE ITSELF OR IN DISARRAY."





Matthias Kranebitter (c) Igor Ripak

How much destructive anger is necessary to create something new? Or is anger the wrong word?

Matthias Kranebitter: I wouldn't even speak of anger here, neither of destruction. My interest lies in disturbance itself – or in disarray. I consider that to be necessary in art. I have always been interested in overcoming boundaries, which also means reflecting on what music actually is at this moment in time and what could be possible outside of it. In a way, creating something new is an aggressive act against habits and confirmed results. But this is not to say that my music defines itself only as a counter-position, but rather as a constant attempt at liberation, as the “opening up to new areas”, a constructive nihilism, as Jean Dubuffet, the father of Art Brut, describes it in his writings.

You have often mentioned your fascination with Art Brut. What exactly is it that interests you in it?

Matthias Kranebitter: I find Dubuffet's paintings very inspiring. In the series “nihilistic studies” I'm referring explicitly to his theory and writings. It's always about the attempt at cultural liberation, about the constructive nihilism mentioned earlier. Many of his paintings – as in Art Brut in general – show these dense, heterogeneous and overloaded textures, a kind of “fantastic noise”, which I also often intend in my pieces. I also see connections between Art Brut and Michail Bakhtin's concept of carnivalization. And in a certain way I also see myself and my work as being outsiders in the academic world of new music.

Collecting and reassembling play an essential role in your work, as already mentioned. In “Pitch Studies”, “Harpsicord Pieces” or “Ghost Box Music” you analyze and arrange the frequency spectra or patterns. In your current commissioned work, “Encyclopedia of Pitch and Deviation”, for Wien Modern and Klangforum Wien, you have, as the title suggests, an encyclopedic approach, apparently following a strict order principle, behind which lies a researching, investigative approach. Is there hope for any gain of knowledge?

Matthias Kranebitter: As I said, I find conceptual backgrounds essential for my composing and I also love to play with apparently analytical methods in the piece itself and to feign a scientific aura.

“Ghost Box Music” was created during my artist-in-residence period at the IZZM Carinthia at the Tonhof in Maria Saal. In this medieval building, which used to be a provincial court, some witch trials took place. There I zapped through the whole radio frequency range with an analog radio and recorded this noise. I used the *Google* dictation function to transcribe words and whole sentences that were not contained as such in the radio noise. This led to the “clustering illusion” described above, but interpreted here by an artificial intelligence. On one hand I let this text be translated by algorithms into spectral chord sequences, converted into music and thus made it into sound. On the other hand, the text and the genesis of the composition are reproduced by an artificial voice. It was interesting to observe that some of the text results could be very well related to the history of the house. Whether these were ghost voices or the omniscient Google algorithm, which perhaps provided me with matching words from the noise based on my location data and previous search engine entries, remains unclear. Both interpretations are spooky. In the end,

the whole piece was more about directing than composing. I took very few musical decisions in it, everything is determined by an invisible hand, so to speak.

Matthias Kranebitter - Ghost Box Music



In the “Encyclopedia” too, there is the extra-musical narrative level of a virtual speaker who leads you through the piece. The piece has a documentary movie character in a certain way. I have done a lot of research and collected lots of information on the topic of pitches and frequencies. I want to share this accumulated, unnecessary knowledge with the audience in a poetic mode. For my part, I find this very entertaining and, in retrospect, I have the feeling that I learned something too about insect wing flapping speeds, planetary orbital harmonics or uranium enrichment.

“THE LIST IS (...) CONSIDERED TO BE THE NARRATIVE FORM OF LATE CAPITALISM PAR EXCELLENCE”





Matthias Kranebitter (c) Igor Ripak

Thus, the focus is on tonal quality, but at the same time it is also a matter of adhering to a strict form.

Matthias Kranebitter: In the two pieces mentioned, I am particularly interested in the form of the work. Even if my passion for collecting relates directly to sounds, as for example in “pitch study No1/contra violin”, an accumulation of completely different sound samples, all of which have a common pitch, this collection, in its presentation as a listing, becomes formative for the piece. The list is in any case considered to be *the* narrative form of late capitalism par excellence, in which the world is explained and understood in rankings and top 10s.

In 2014 you founded the [Black Page Orchestra](https://www.musicexport.at/artist/black-page-orchestra/), of which you have been the artistic director since then. What was your motivation behind this?

Matthias Kranebitter: I think that every composer should actually start his or her own ensemble in order to be as independent as possible when composing. If you don't have your own ensemble, you often have to make compromises for the performance of your pieces to please someone else, and that's not always an advantage. I also love the curatorial work for the concerts of our ensemble. I get to know a lot, especially about the younger generation.

After finishing my studies, I had the feeling that there was quite a gap in the Austrian music scene and that a lot of interesting music by young composers was not yet heard in Austria. Of course, no one else than our generation itself is responsible for this. From this point of view, the creation of our own ensemble was an aesthetic necessity.

The same year you also created the *Unsafe+Sounds Festival*, through which you are continuing this mission. How do you combine these roles?

Matthias Kranebitter: The festival was created at the same time as the ensemble, as a platform and to complete the chain composer – ensemble – organizer. With the festival we wanted to get out of the academic new music environment, and I think we succeeded very well. When I created the festival, I had no idea that both the ensemble and the festival would still exist in 2020, and this for sure has also something to do with my brilliant colleague.

Many thanks for the interview!

Shilla Strelka

**Matthias Kranebitter has been awarded the Erste Bank Composition Prize 2020. His composition will be played by Klangforum Wien and the world premiere will take place on November 18 at the Wien Modern Festival in Vienna.*

Dates:

October 17-20, 2020 – “America or the infection” – F23, Siren Opera Theater

October 22, 2020 – Glass Hall, Musikverein

November 18, 2020 – “Encyclopedia of Pitch and Deviation”, Klangforum Wien, Mozartsaal, Konzerthaus – Wien Modern

February 23, 2021 – Trio Catch, Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg

Translated from the [German original \(https://www.musicaustria.at/ich-suche-keinen-zufluchtsort-sondern-die-zumutung-matthias-kranebitter-im-mica-interview/\)](https://www.musicaustria.at/ich-suche-keinen-zufluchtsort-sondern-die-zumutung-matthias-kranebitter-im-mica-interview/) by Julian Schoenfeld

Links:

[Matthias Kranebitter \(Website\)](#)

[\(https://matthiaskranebitter.com/\)](https://matthiaskranebitter.com/)Black Page Orchestra (Website)

[\(https://www.blackpageorchestra.org/\)](https://www.blackpageorchestra.org/)Unsafe+Sounds Festival (Facebook)

<https://www.facebook.com/unsafeandsounds>Wien Modern (Website) [\(https://www.wienmodern.at/\)](https://www.wienmodern.at/)

[ERSTE BANK COMPOSITION AWARD](#)

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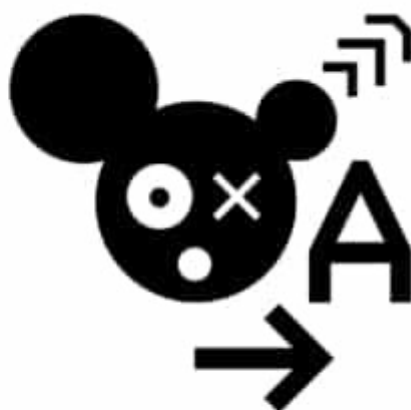


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The logo for ÖST.MUSIKFONDS features the word "ÖST" in a bold, red, uppercase sans-serif font, followed by ".MUSIKFONDS" in a smaller, grey, uppercase sans-serif font.

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