SHAPE

2025

2024

PLATFORM FOR
INNOVATIVE MUSIC AND
INTERDISCIPLINARY ART

Platform for Innovative Music and Interdis-ciplinary Art

Table of Contents

Member Organisations

Construction Festival
Dnipro, Ukraine
constructionfest.com

CTM Festival
Berlin, Germany
ctm-festival.de

Full of Lava
Bern, Switzerland
dampfzentrale.ch

Intonal Festival
Malmö, Sweden
intonalfestival.com

Les Siestes
Toulouse, France / Coimbra, Portugal
les-siestes-electroniques.com

MeetFactory
Prague, Czech Republic
meetfactory.cz

Mutant Radio
Tbilisi, Georgia
mutantradio.net

musikprotokoll
Graz, Austria
musikprotokoll.orf.at

OUT.FEST
Barreiro, Portugal
outfest.pt

Polja
Šutci, Serbia
www.instagram.com/poljafestival

Rewire
The Hague, Netherlands

www.rewirefestival.nl

Rokolectiv
Bucharest, Romania
rokolectiv.ro

schiev
Brussels, Belgium
schiev.com

Skaņu Mežs
Riga, Latvia
skanumezs.lv

Sonica Festival
Ljubljana, Slovenia
sonica.si

Terraforma Festival
Milan, Italy
terraformafestival.com

UH Fest
Budapest, Hungary
uh.hu

Unsound
Kraków, Poland
unsound.pl

SHAPE+ Supported Artists

The artist roster has been created with creative novelty, diversity and successful experimentation as core values, with additional emphasis on the inclusion of up-and-coming and underexposed artists and scenes that are often overlooked by promoters or media outlets specialising in music and art.

7777 の天使 PT
ABADIR EG/DE
AHO SSAN FR
ALE HOP PE/DE
ALEKSANDRA SŁYŻ PL/SE
BABAU IT
BELLA BÁGUENA ES
BILIANA VOUTCHKOVA BG/DE
BRYOZONE UA
EVITA MANJI GR
FELISHA LEDESMA US/DE
FORCES FI
FRÉDÉRIC D. OBERLAND & IRENA Z. TOMAŽIN FR/SI
HETA BILALETDIN FI
ISABELLA FORCINITI AT/IT
KATARINA GRYVUL UA
LUIS PESTANA PT
MARINA HERLOP ES
MARYANA KLOCHKO UA
M.A.T.A.D.A.T.A. LV
MIHALIS SHAMMAS CY
NFNR UA
NZIRIA IT
OÏ LES OX FR
PASSEPARTOUT DUO IT
PERILA RU/DE
PISITAKUN TH/DE
QOW EG/CZ
REHAB HAZGUI TN
ROXANE MÉTAYER BE/FR
STEFANIE EGEDY BR/DE
THEA SOTI HU/SRB/FR
TONY ELIEH LB/DE
URSULA SEREGHY CZ
VANLIGT FOLK SE
VICA PACHECO MX/BE
WOJCIECH RUSIN PL
YARA MEKAWEI EG/DE
ZBIGNIEW CHOJNACKI PL

Photo Libor Galia

ALTO FUERO FR
AMINA HOCINE SE
ANNA FIŠERE LV
ANTHEA CADDY AU/DE
AWWWARA GE
BELA KR/DE
BINTANG MANIRA MANIK ID/NL
BRIDGET FERRILL US/DE
CANDELA CAPITÁN ES
CASSIUS LAMBERT SE
CUCINA POVERA LUX/FI
FÉLICIA ATKINSON FR
FRANCESCA HEART IT
HEINALI UA
IZTOK KOREN SI
JUBA UK/DE
KAJSA MAGNARSSON SE
KORUTH CZ
L. ZYLBERBERG DE
MANJA RISTIĆ SRB/HR
MARTYNA BASTA PL
MAX EILBACHER US/DE
MAXIME DENUC FR/BE
MAYA SHENFELD INT
MORITA VARGAS AR/NL
NEMEROV HU
NEXCYIA US/FR/UK
NICOLA RATTI IT
NIKOLAIENKO UA/NL
NZE NZE FR
OJOO MAR/BE
OLDYUNGMAYN EG/DE
PAUL GRÜNDORFER AT
PETRA HERMANOVA CZ/DE
PÖ GHA/FR
RITA SILVA PT/NL
ROBERT SCHWARZ AT
SABIWA TW/DE
SARA PERSICO IT/DE
SÉBASTIEN FORRESTER FR
TAHEREH NOURANI IR/AT
TRIGLAV HU
VISIO IT
XEXA PT
ZESKNEL GE

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2K88 PL
ABDULLAH MINIAWY EG/FR
ADELA MEDE SK/HU
ALYS(ALYS)ALYS BR/DE
ANDRIY K. UA/DE
ANJA LAUVDAL NO
ANTONINA NOWACKA PL/IT
ASSYOUTI EG/DE
CAROLINA SANTIAGO ES/FR
CCL DE/US
CIRO VITIELLO IT
CLARISSA CONNELLY SCT/DK
DALI MURU & THE POLYPHONIC SWARM FR/UK
DANIA IQ/ES/AUS
DANIEL SZWED PL
DINO SPILUTTINI AT
DONNA CANDY FR/BE
DONNA HARINGWEY PT
DROGDED HU
ELISCHA HELLER CH
ENRICO MALATESTA IT
EUGÈNE BLOVE FR
EVE ABOULKHEIR FR
FIESTA EN EL VACÍO FR
FUJITA PINNACLE SI
HA KYOON FR/KR
IRENE BIANCO DK
JACQNOISE DE/NL
JAN NEMEČEK RS
JOHN CHANTLER SE
JULIAN SARTORIUS CH
JUNGE EKO CH
KHRYSTYNA KIRIK UA
KINGA ÖTVÖS RO/DE
LAMINA FR/BE
LENHART TAPES RS
LÉNOK SK/NL
LUKAS DE CLERCK BE
MALA ROZA MUCA & PIXEL.BAMBI SI
SÒN DU MAQUÍS FR
MARYLOU DE
NASI & ALEXANDER GE
NIC KROG DK/DE
NICK DUNSTON US/DE
OTAY:ONII CN/US/DE
PAULA VĪTOLA LV
PYUR DE
RADIO HITO BE
SANTIAGO LATORRE ES
SISSI RADA GR/DE
SOFI LV/FI
STATOIL DK
TARTA RELENA ES
TONOTA HR

Introduction

by Emily Moore

Experimental music certainly had its 15 seconds of fame this year. Whether it was Charli XCX, on winning her fifth award of the night at the Brits, paying homage to Autechre, Aphex Twin and SOPHIE for influencing the paradigm-shifting album *Brat*; or Daniel Blumberg, clearly unused to the bright spotlights of Hollywood award ceremonies, delivering an endearing acceptance speech for The Brutalist score at the Oscars, (literally) singing the praises of Cafe OTO and the "hardworking, radical musicians who've been making uncompromising music for many years".

Music on the peripheries of mainstream culture has always had an impact on its centre. This year, that impact has played out more visibly than ever before. The more that peripheral edge is watered and nurtured, the richer the soil – and the brighter and bolder are the flowers that grow. Here, on this periphery, we find the SHAPE+ platform: a dedicated plant nursery fostering the growth of emerging music experimenters. Some will go on to pull and push the edges of this periphery, moving the centre along with it and thus actively shaping the cultural landscape.

I've attended the annual SHAPE+ artist meet-up in Prague for the last two years, delivering a lecture on music publishing and A&R in an attempt to demystify the convoluted world of publishing, and more generally to explain how an artist making experimental music can make a sustainable income. Many artists on the roster of Warp, where I work, have been selected for the programme – Clarissa Connelly, Caterina Barbieri, Still House Plants – as well as some of my personal favourites: Valentina Magaletti, Lyra Pramuk, Astrid Sonne and Crystallmess.

Whilst SHAPE+ focuses on artists who have escaped broader international attention, some have also gone on to become leading voices within their scenes and beyond. Caterina Barbieri has been appointed Artistic Director of the Music Department at the Venice Biennale 2025/26, and Crystallmess DJed onstage at Coachella for Frank Ocean's set in 2023. These artists may have begun their careers on the outskirts of the cultural centre, but they have turned a spotlight onto their work and attracted well-deserved recognition from a global audience.

The annual artist meet-up takes place at MeetFactory in Prague, an old building in the city's industrial district, sandwiched between a railway track and a viaduct. The sounds of cargo rattling along these two transport lines feels fitting for a convening of such artists, many of whose soundworlds derive from Europe's industrial infrastructure. The weekend programme consists of artist introductions, followed by a series of lectures, workshops, and a live music showcase.

In the morning sessions, where the artists give a brief introduction of their work and practice, followed by a snippet of music, I witnessed warmth and generosity. It reconfirmed my reasons for working in this particular corner of the music industry and defied common preconceptions about it. Here, an ostensibly aloof and elitist scene showed its true colours – excellent musicians, sometimes shyly but always generously, sharing their work and laughing with one another. Some played down their talent, while others proudly displayed their projects.

In the lectures, artists and speakers discussed openly what a viable, stable career could look like for avant-garde artists. I gave examples of artists I've worked with whose composition work traversed many different, sometimes surprising, areas: Squarepusher scoring for a kids' television series; Kelsey Lu scoring an eight-hour lucid dream experience in Sydney; Loraine James composing music from Ubisoft's sound archive. Harsh realities weren't shied away from either. Another guest lecturer spoke about the music industry under capitalism existing in a strangulating supply-and-demand system. We acknowledged that not everyone who wants to pursue a career making leftfield music would succeed. And yet, among those who convened that weekend, there seemed to be a shared understanding of this already.

We know that carving a path in this corner of the industry isn't easy, but our love for our craft, our scenes, and a sense of purpose and community means that we wouldn't be anywhere else. Across the years, I've kept in touch with artists I met through SHAPE+. Evita Manji and Donna Candy have both passed through the Warp studios when performing in London. While the SHAPE+ programme lasts just 12 months, the artists – this year there were around 60 of them – along withthe guest speakers, become part of a growing community for the long term.

SHAPE+'s contribution to Europe's burgeoning experimental music scene can't be overstated. Each year it boosts the profiles of lesser-known or new acts. When the annual programme is announced, I read through and listen to the entire list of artists, and I know many of my peers working in the industry do the same. More than just a mentoring programme for individual artists, SHAPE+ also unifies experimental music scenes across the continent more broadly. Music festivals such as Terraforma, Skaņu Mežs and UH Fest are brought together to select artists from their local scenes who deserve recognition. Naturally, issues unique to each scene are raised in this process – such as the unequal flow of resources and attention toward Western European artists, or the struggle of festivals in Eastern Europe to book international artists, some of whom plan their tours only within the western half of the continent to keep them financially viable.

Political crises or protests directly linked to the scenes are also frequently mentioned within the SHAPE+ community: Georgia's club closures in solidarity with the demonstrations this year; the cultural boycott against Germany's draconian clamp-down on the Palestine movement; the Serbian club scene helping fuel the country's surging student-led movement at the end of 2024. Kelly Projects writes of the latter in a Mixmag article:

"in Belgrade, clubbers don't just see nightlife as an escape, they see it as an act of defiance. From the raves of the 1990s, when Belgrade's youth used electronic music as a means of escape and defiance during the Yugoslav Wars, to today's underground scene, music has provided both refuge and resistance."

Music scenes have always been intrinsically tied to the political landscapes they are born from, and vice versa: some of the recent political movements across Europe have been catalysed by music communities. SHAPE+ provides a physical and digital meeting place for these discussions and concerns, led by artists who are directly affected.

Most importantly, I think SHAPE+ platform gives these artists time and space. It tells them that what they are doing is valued. We are now living in a fast-moving culture that emphasises intensity and speed, a sentiment reminiscent of the Futurist Manifesto, published at the height of European modernism:

"We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible? Time and Space died yesterday."

SHAPE+ platform sees these 'shutters of the impossible' differently. The fruits that lie behind them are only explorable with – not against – time and space.

A programme that gives artists a year to stretch, breathe, think, make mistakes and play is something to cherish.

What SHAPE+ doesn't claim to deliver, or to particularly value, is a path to winning awards such as the Brits and the Oscars. Nor is that the intention of most experimental artists embarking on a career in leftfield music. I've rarely heard an artist in this scene say their dream is to land a cut on a major pop artist's record or to win big at the Grammys (for some, it may be a quiet wish, which I would still encourage!). Most are averse to that sort of recognition. Some believe that the essence of the underground scene has been diluted by the imposition of – and extraction by – mainstream culture. For some, being shouted out onstage at an awards ceremony – often an ostentatious display of wealth, packed with buzzwords and saccharine Hollywood smiles – is no marker of success.

But when these award winners do namecheck and pay homage to the fringes, as they did this year, it's a nod to those on the peripheries whose "uncompromising" work is what defines them – Cafe OTO, SHAPE+ platform, bookers and artists gracing the lineups of Rewire, Unsound, and Le Guess Who?. It's telling them that they hold in their hands the threads that can be collectively woven into ropes capable of pulling the centre this way or that. And with those ropes, they can impact not only the cultural mainstream but also the ideologies that exist there. Now, when we speak, the mainstream might be more inclined to listen. Our politics, ideas about social relations, and visions for the future become harder to ignore.

We must now ask the question: aside from a thank you, how can these large actors in the mainstream pay their dues for plucking ideas from the fringes? The vital role experimental music plays in this ecosystem is now evident. What we want from prominent cultural institutions and individuals in film, music and fashion is not just a nod to these influences but proper compensation for their work and support for their continuation. Cafe OTO's neighbouring studio – the artist hub V22 Ashwin Street – is currently under threat of eviction. That could be a place to start, and we certainly won't be short of other arts community spaces in need of support.

Again, it is not the aim of SHAPE+, or other 'counter-cultural' institutions, to garner recognition from the cultural nucleus. But mention of them at these award ceremonies reminds us all that, as Daniel Blumberg said, behind each singular artist there is a circuit of hard-working, uncompromising musicians on the perimeter. We don't need to bring that perimeter into the centre; we just need to keep it alive and watered.

Emily Moore, Warp

Artist Testimonials

Passepartout Duo

SHAPE+
2022—2023

Our Journey Through SHAPE+: A Personal Reflection

When we received the news that Passepartout Duo had been selected for the 2022 SHAPE+ roster, we had no idea how profoundly this experience would shape our artistic journey. The initial roster meeting in Prague wasn't just another artist gathering but rather an important moment of exchange with fellow musicians and a moment of awareness of how our practice could be supported while we still remained an independent music group.

Not Your Usual Conversation

The Prague meeting brought together a diverse group of artists and industry professionals under one roof. Three conversations from those days still echo in our minds, each leaving a mark on how we approach our everyday tasks.

Freddie Hudson, with his journalist's perspective, challenged our notions about music promotion. It was illuminating to understand how building relationships with journalists doesn't necessarily have to have immediate results; it's rather about sustained conversation and authentic connection. This shifted our mindset – we began viewing press outreach as planting seeds rather than expecting instant blooms.

Then there was Emily Moore's class on publishing houses – a timely gift from the universe. When an unexpected opportunity to create a feature soundtrack arose in 2023, we were better prepared to approach the contracts and negotiations involved.

Perhaps most practical was Lukáš Turza's candid breakdown of the mixing and mastering process. His technical insights proved invaluable when we found ourselves in a professional mastering studio for the first time in 2023. Rather than feeling intimidated, we arrived prepared with clear communication points and realistic expectations.

Finding Our Place in the Festival Ecosystem

Our official SHAPE+ performance took place at Sonica Festival in Slovenia in September 2022. The curation positioned us alongside Gil Delindro, a longtime friend of ours and SHAPE alumnus whose multidisciplinary approach

resonates with our own artistic approach – both in sound installations and live performances. An interesting development in festival curation in recent years has been the creation of a diverse sonic landscape through parallel stages featuring experimental acts alongside more mainstream offerings.

This trend excites us for two reasons. First, it fosters natural cross-over between audiences who might otherwise remain in separate musical universes, Our Journey Through SHAPE+: A Personal Reflection

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This trend excites us for two reasons. First, it fosters natural crossover between audiences who might otherwise remain in separate musical universes, potentially making experimental music more sustainable in the long run. Second, it relieves individual artists of the entire burden of audience development – the festival's established platform does much of the heavy lifting.

Serendipity

While the official programming was valuable in itself, the lasting treasure of SHAPE+ has been the friendships forged with fellow artists. As perpetual travellers, we've developed a practice of reconnecting with SHAPE+ colleagues wherever our paths might cross. These spontaneous reunions have occurred in Budapest, Taipei, Nicosia, Stockholm, Berlin, Tunis, and Niigata – each encounter deepening the sense of belonging to a larger network.

Some connections have blossomed into collaborative opportunities. In 2023, passing through Helsinki turned into an impromptu concert when Forces (Joonas Siren) and Heta Bilatedin arranged for us to share a bill at the indie venue Pertin Valinta – something we could never have organised independently. Similarly, in early 2025, our friends from Babau/Artetetra (Matteo Pennesi and Luigi Monteanni) included us in their "Future Pidgin" concert series in Milan, extending the SHAPE+ community's impact well beyond the programme's official time frame.

Reimagining European Music-Making

SHAPE+ fundamentally transformed our understanding of what it means to create music within a European context. While we had always prioritised international travel, the programme revealed the importance of adopting a broader collaborative perspective that transcends national boundaries.

What makes the European music scene unique, in our opinion, is its remarkable diversity within a relatively compact ecosystem – each country harbouring distinct traditions, venues, funding structures, and audiences. Experiencing these variations firsthand and exchanging insights with artists navigating different contexts has expanded our creative vocabulary and strengthened our resilience as artists.

The unified application platform that SHAPE+ provides also addresses a practical challenge many artists face: the substantial unpaid labour

required to research, prepare, and target applications for various opportunities. Having a single point of entry for multiple festivals and residencies significantly reduces this burden, allowing more time for actual creation.

Moreover, we would like to highlight the inclusiveness of a project like SHAPE. We often come across open calls for projects that are based on nationality or on exchanges between only a few specific countries, but clearly not every country is offering such opportunities, which is why we truly value what is offered by these few larger European-funded networks. They give us the chance to connect with other, smaller scenes. It's also very nice how SHAPE has created a well-organised online archive with materials and original interviews related to each artist's work – something that helps with the contextualisation of the music itself.

Paying It Forward

Perhaps the most tangible evidence of SHAPE+'s influence on our work is "Babbasawt," a workshop-residency project we launched in January 2025. Created in collaboration with Tunis-based organisation Dar Meso, this initiative focuses on sound research and DIY instrument making – directly inspired by the decentralised structure of SHAPE+.

Like our mentor program, we envision Babbasawt as a flexible framework capable of engaging with emerging cultural hotspots throughout Europe and neighboring regions, with each iteration finding local partners who share our passion for sonic exploration. During the inaugural session in Tunis, we shared our knowledge of instrument design and electronics, hoping to spark a chain reaction of creativity that extends far beyond our direct involvement.

As we reflect on our SHAPE+ journey, we're struck by how a single opportunity can generate such profound ripples. What began as roster membership has evolved into a constellation of relationships, artistic exchanges, and new initiatives that continue to unfold in unexpected ways. This is perhaps the true essence of such programmes – not just the official performances and recognition, but the organic, ongoing community that emerges when artists are given space to connect, collaborate, and make things happen together.

Passepartout Duo (SHAPE+ 2022—2023). Drawing from a carefully selected palette of electro-acoustic textures and shapeshifting rhythms, Passepartout Duo's work investigates the way in which we listen to and connect with sound.

Martyna Basta

SHAPE+
2023—2024

I never thought I'd get to this point. Not so long ago, the idea of releasing an album seemed like a distant fantasy. And now here I am, part of the SHAPE+ roster. It seems surreal, almost as if it happened before I noticed. As I walk into the meeting, I'm greeted by familiar faces, but one comment catches me off guard. "Your name is everywhere now," one girl exclaims as we shake hands, and I can't help but feel a pang of impostor syndrome creeping up on me. I wasn't at my best as I left the hotel, already nervous about the occasion. But with bela on my left and Maria (Cucina Povera) on my right - both familiar from our shared line-ups in 2023 - I pluck up the courage to grab a salad and join the conversation.

The clatter of plates dominates the room, friendly laughter. bela shows me what they've been listening to lately and it's everything from metal growls to Korean folk music. It's funny to think back to that time, especially now that their incredible new album, *Noise and Cries* 굉음과 울음, which was released in April (2024), blends these diverse influences. Trust me, whatever you're doing, just stop and give it a listen.

The next day, we each presented one of our own tracks, so we had a chance to listen to each other's music. It seemed that each of us was obsessed with something different, which I thought at the time might make for some nice collaborations. As I write this, I realise even more clearly that even though our time in SHAPE+ is almost over, these could be connections that last a lifetime.

Time truly flies, and I feel both a tinge of sadness as well as excitement for the other artists who will get their chance this year, because there's so much to look forward to. I've just returned from Sonica in Ljubljana, which once again made me think that the people who organise these festivals are angels. I had similar feelings after schiev in Brussels - I just wanted to hug everyone there until they couldn't breathe! I'd like to think it's like that everywhere. Now that it's Coachella month, I think we should appreciate smaller festivals even more.

After arriving in Ljubljana, I took a moment to rest before heading for Radio Študent for an interview. The city is small, so I went for a walk. I went along the river and eventually found myself next to the wooded Tivoli Park and the picturesque streets lined with grand old villas and

towering trees. The radio is on the top floor of a residential building, and the stickers that cover the entire lift already tell you what it's all about. Jaša Bužinel, one of the curators of the Sonica programme, whom I met downstairs, confirms my belief: "It was founded by students in 1969, providing them with a platform for independence and resistance against communism." With over 50 years on the air, it's one of the longest-running non-commercial stations in Europe and embodies certain values that are close to its heart. Jaša recounted a time when playing Solange's new album sparked a heated debate, noting with a chuckle, "I think it's a bit more open-minded now, but Taylor Swift is still not exactly welcome here."

After the interview, Jaša took me to the phonotheque, a treasure trove brimming with vinyl records, CDs, and tapes that had accumulated since the radio station began. The air felt almost dense, thickened with the weight of time, lingering all around. We wondered how long it would take to listen to every album in the room - perhaps a lifetime, or even two? I looked out the window and saw Ljubljana from above, covered in vibrant green as spring breathed new life into everything. The castle on the hill, the majestic mountains in the distance - my heart swelled with affection, knowing I'd return one day.

To be part of a festival is to get a glimpse behind the curtain, to see the passion and hard work of often just a few friends who make it all happen. When I'm taken to places like this and allowed to reveal a little bit more, I feel really lucky. Another highlight is sharing the stage with artists you admire. Sharing the bill with someone whose music you're a fan of, or someone whose music you discover only after the show and become a fan of - has happened to me many times. Both are equally exciting.

At schiev I finally got to meet Felisha Ledesma as we were playing the same night - we've been in touch for some time and know each other through music, so it was nice to catch up in the real world over a few glasses of wine. She played after me, so I had the chance to decompress after my set and really immerse myself in her music. As I lay on the floor behind a stage curtain, I felt lucky once again.

The next day, she gave a workshop on modular synthesis and automatonism, and as my head was definitely too dense for it, I remembered and still cherish a phrase she shared that really struck me, "music is just wiggly air". For a brief moment it lifted the weight of the world. I hope it does the same for you as you read these words.

Martyna Basta is a 2023–24 SHAPE+ artist, based in Krakow, Poland. Her diaristic sound shapes a delicate atmosphere that balances lush and haunting.

Abdullah Miniawy

SHAPE+
2024—2025

At the end of 2022, after thoroughly exploring the various incredible projects I had participated in, whether in a small or leading role, I took the time to reflect deeply on the major challenges of adaptation and integration that had been present in all these projects. It became clear to me that leaving a project was often a slow process, tied to written and verbal agreements with producers and distributors. This realisation made me question the nature of commitment in artistic collaborations and how the industry sometimes expects an indefinite level of engagement. Perhaps some of the producers and distributors I worked with are reading this, and if so, I sincerely apologise for any disruption my departure may have caused to their livelihoods. However, I also want to acknowledge the eight wonderful years we shared together. During that time, we toured extensively, performed over two hundred concerts, won awards, and celebrated many small victories that defined our journey.

One of the defining moments that shifted my artistic path was a conversation with Emmanuel Sundin from Inkonst in Malmö in 2022. He encouraged me to pursue a solo project, especially after an entire tour was cancelled due to one of the artists becoming a father. That moment forced me to confront an uncomfortable truth. I had given so much to my art, and it was often at the expense of my personal life. It was a wake-up call, and it made me reconsider my priorities and the direction of my career. This was when I first began to conceptualise *Nigma Enigma*, my first solo album, which was later released on Hundebiss. The process of writing this album became a much-needed creative outlet. For the first time in a long while, I allowed myself to step away from collaborative projects and fully embrace my individual artistic vision.

During this transitional period, my dear friend, the visual artist Beatrice Bianchini, sent me a link to SHAPE+. At the time, I knew little about the platform, but something about it immediately resonated with me. Without hesitation, I decided this was the perfect opportunity to propose a unique live solo performance. The response was swift and encouraging. What struck me the most was how SHAPE+ was not just about providing a platform but also about fostering a sense of artistic community. Just as they supported me in pushing forward my vision, I also contributed by promoting them to my network and artistic partnerships. Over time, we developed a strong and reciprocal relationship. They facilitated crucial connections, and ensured that artists were well placed. Their structured and organised

approach helped establish a clear vision for both the artists and their partners, making the creative process smoother and more sustainable.

Collaborating with SHAPE+ played a crucial role in helping me realign my artistic path, particularly after some major projects I was involved in were suddenly brought to an end. One of these projects had even won the prestigious Victoires du Jazz award in France in 2023, yet its abrupt halt left me questioning my next steps. SHAPE+ offered me a new sense of direction and, more importantly, renewed my trust in my own artistic voice. It was through this collaboration that I allowed myself to move beyond the expected role of a singer and delve into new creative territories. For the first time, I felt confident enough to experiment with programming and to explore game development as an extension of my artistic expression. SHAPE+ trusted my unconventional ideas, and their belief in my work gave me the courage to push forward with concepts that are often met with resistance. Many people only want to engage with my voice as a singer, but few take an interest in the other sides of my creativity. The painter, the programmer, and the writer have often been overlooked, particularly since my transition to Europe. These aspects of my identity were more present during my time in Egypt, especially during the glorious January Revolution. However, in the years that followed, they seemed to fade away, overshadowed by the expectations of the industry and the audience.

Through the support of SHAPE+ and its eighteen partner organisations, I was able to showcase my work at five remarkable festivals. Among these were Musikprotokoll in Austria and CTM in Germany, both of which held personal significance for me. Prior to this, I had only attended these festivals as a visitor or a guest of honour, but this time, I was presenting my own work. Standing on those stages and sharing my art in such respected spaces felt like a pivotal moment in my journey.

Arriving in Prague was another unforgettable experience. Although the initial plans for my programme did not align exactly as expected, I was able to make the most of my time there. On the last day, I caught up with many of the artists, some of whom I had only known through online interactions. Meeting them in person for the first time was both exciting and surreal. What surprised me the most was discovering that many of the artists I admired were also fans of my work. Late into the evening, I immersed myself in incredible music and encountered the work of Nic Krog, sofi, and several other promising artists. These unexpected encounters and the energy of the art scene left a lasting impression on me.

On a personal level, I firmly believe that SHAPE+ is an incredibly important initiative for both emerging and established artists. It provides a vital platform for those who want to launch unconventional projects that do not fit neatly

within commercial frameworks. Many artists have ideas that are difficult to market, and without platforms like SHAPE+, these ideas might never find their audience. At the same time, it is important for participants to recognise the immense work carried out by the SHAPE+ team. The opportunities offered through the grant should not be taken for granted. Artists should actively engage with the resources provided and make the most of this platform by continuously pushing forward new ideas and embracing creative risks.

With fifty-four artists selected for 2024, there is no doubt that attention will be spread among many different artists. This means that visibility will naturally fluctuate, and at times, it may even fade. Artists must take responsibility for maintaining momentum, seeking out new energies, and evolving their craft to remain relevant. The artistic journey is not just about being given opportunities but also about actively shaping them.

One of the most valuable experiences I had through SHAPE+ was connecting with key journalists from the European art scene like Shilla Strelka. Some of these journalists are true fighters, deeply engaged in underground and experimental movements, and their dedication to supporting alternative voices is truly inspiring. The SHAPE+ public relations campaign was particularly effective in expanding my reach, connecting me to publications like Crack Magazine and other similar platforms. I am especially grateful for the article that Lucia Udvardyová wrote about my work, which was shared on SHAPE+ social media channels. These kinds of media connections are invaluable for artists, not just in terms of exposure but also in building meaningful dialogues around our work.`

Reflecting on this entire experience, I can say with certainty that SHAPE+ came into my life at exactly the right moment. It allowed me to step into a new phase of my artistic journey, one where I felt empowered to explore beyond the expectations placed upon me. It provided me with the freedom to experiment, the support to push forward my vision, and the platform to share my work with new audiences. I would strongly encourage any artist seeking to carve out their own unique path to embrace the opportunities that SHAPE+ has to offer. The artistic world is constantly evolving, and it is through initiatives like this that we find new ways to grow, challenge conventions, and redefine what is possible.

2024-25 SHAPE+ artist Abdullah Miniawy is an Egyptian expressionist, a writer, singer, composer, and actor.

Construction

NFNR photographed by Vira Dumke

CTM

NZIRIA photographed by Frankie Casillo

Full of Lava

Otaynoii photographed by Yoshiko Kusano

Les Siestes

Alto Fuero photographed by Queenie F. Charles

Mihalis Shammas photographed by Camilla Rehnstrand

Pestana Foss Hällback photographed by Camilla Rehnstrand

MeetFactory

PÖ photographed by Libor Galia

musikprotokoll

Sabiwa and Nathan L photographed by Martin Gross

DROGDED photographed by Tako Skripnichenko

Gavilan Rayna Russom photographed by Jaba Ujmajuridze

Rita Silva photographed by Vera Marmelo

XEXA photographed by Vera Marmelo


Polja
SHAPE
Iztok Koren photographed by Srdjan Mančev

Rokolectiv

Bintang Manira Manik photographed by Vlad Dumitrescu

Santiago Latorre photographed by Vlad Dumitrescu

schiev

Katarina Gryvul photograhped by Pauline Vanden Neste

Skaņu Mežs

Clarissa Conelly photographed by Arnis Kalniņš

Nick Dunston photographed by Arnis Kalniņš

Sonica

Bridget Ferill, Rouge-ah, pixel.bambi photographed by Katja Goljat

Eunoé, Clarice Calvo-Pinsolle photographed by Giacomo Alberico

Kinga Ötvös photographed by Menyhért Hivessy

Ale Hop photographed by Csilla Fodor

Marek Piesyalski photographed by Grzegorz Jasina

Sometimes I see performing complicated emergency procedures as similar to performing live

Interview with Dania

An architect of textured, neo-ambient soundscapes, Dania explores both sound and identity, focusing specifically on how the latter has fractured in a post-colonial world. Born in Baghdad, raised in Tasmania, and now based in Barcelona, she moves between cultures and continents, her amorphous creative vision directly tied to her transient existence. The founder of the experimental platform Paralaxe Editions, Dania divides her time between Spain and the remote corners of Australia, where she works as an emergency doctor. Her musical practice, however, is preoccupied with harmonics and tonality, weaving together manipulated vocal fragments, processed field recordings and meditative atmospheres.

Hi Dania. When I first approached you, you mentioned you were busy working in Australia as an emergency doctor. So, in addition to being a musician and a label founder, you also work in medicine. Can you talk about these seemingly distant professions in terms of lifestyle and modus operandi? Do these two career paths influence each other? If so, how?

Hi. Yes, I'm an emergency doctor. I work in remote areas of Australia where about 40% of my patients are indigenous Australians, who have extremely poor health outcomes. I see diseases that have not existed in European populations since the 1800s. A lot of my work is stabilising patients and organising patient transfer flights to bigger hospitals. My lifestyle is quite split; I spend about half the time working in Australia and half the time in Spain, where I focus on music and art. The lifestyles are very different. When I'm in Australia, my days are fixed, structured, long, and challenging, and I have terrible insomnia. I often don't have the emotional bandwidth or energy to do anything creative after hours, although sometimes I'll bring my flute along with me.

In Spain, the tempo is different. In a way, my brain is always on, as there are no fixed workdays, so a lot of time is spent thinking, reading and creating. It takes a while for me to switch into this mode of operating, as I'm used to having immediate and tangible outcomes from a day of work at the hospital. In Barcelona, I spend my days either in my studio or at home experimenting with sounds and machines, finding different ways to extract sounds from objects.

The two aspects of my life don't often intersect, but sometimes there are moments, like when I listen to someone's chest with my stethoscope, interpreting the different frequencies and rhythms of their internal organs to make a diagnosis. The body is an instrument. I'm still thinking of collecting these sounds, but they might be too medically coded to be artistically viable, although Milton Graves did a lot of work with the human body and rhythm, so who knows – maybe I'll explore it in the future. I do sometimes draw on human experiences. I just wrote a song called "Heart Shaped Burn" about a patient of mine who was scalded with hot oil by her partner. He left a perfectly shaped heart-shaped burn on her chest. She was initially very intimidated by the hospital environment, but I broke the ice by pointing out the strange burn. I think we both understood the dark irony of the situation.

One thing is that sometimes I see performing complicated emergency procedures as similar to performing live. Take inserting a drain into someone's chest. There are certain steps to follow, buttons to push and an order to the 'performance', but there is also an improvisational aspect, where you need to think quite quickly and creatively on your feet when things change or when there are complications.

You were born in Baghdad, raised in Tasmania and are now based in Barcelona. Your multicultural background and upbringing, as well as your current situation, do not allow for stasis and conformity. I guess fluidity and openness are embedded in you and your work. Can you tell us more about your background?

Yes, I was born in Baghdad, and I left as a child during the Iran-Iraq war. Most of my family left as refugees; we were against the Western proxy war and Saddam's regime. I have never been back to Iraq since then, and have only ever met a handful of other relatives. This has fundamentally coloured the way I see the world.

I grew up in Tasmania in the 90s, when there were very few Arab immigrants. It was overwhelmingly white, and we were the only Arab family in the town where I lived. Over time, more immigrants arrived, but we were alone for a while. I think Tasmania is quite different now. I finished my medical degree there and then moved to Western Australia.

After a few years of medical training, I felt this overwhelming urge to do something creative. I was spiritually defeated, lost, and was struggling with medical burnout. I eventually decided to take a year off to travel

and clear my mind. What was meant to be just a visit to Barcelona has turned into more than 13 years of being here and making it my home.

You also run the Paralaxe Editions label. What led you to establish it, and what kind of music are you searching for?

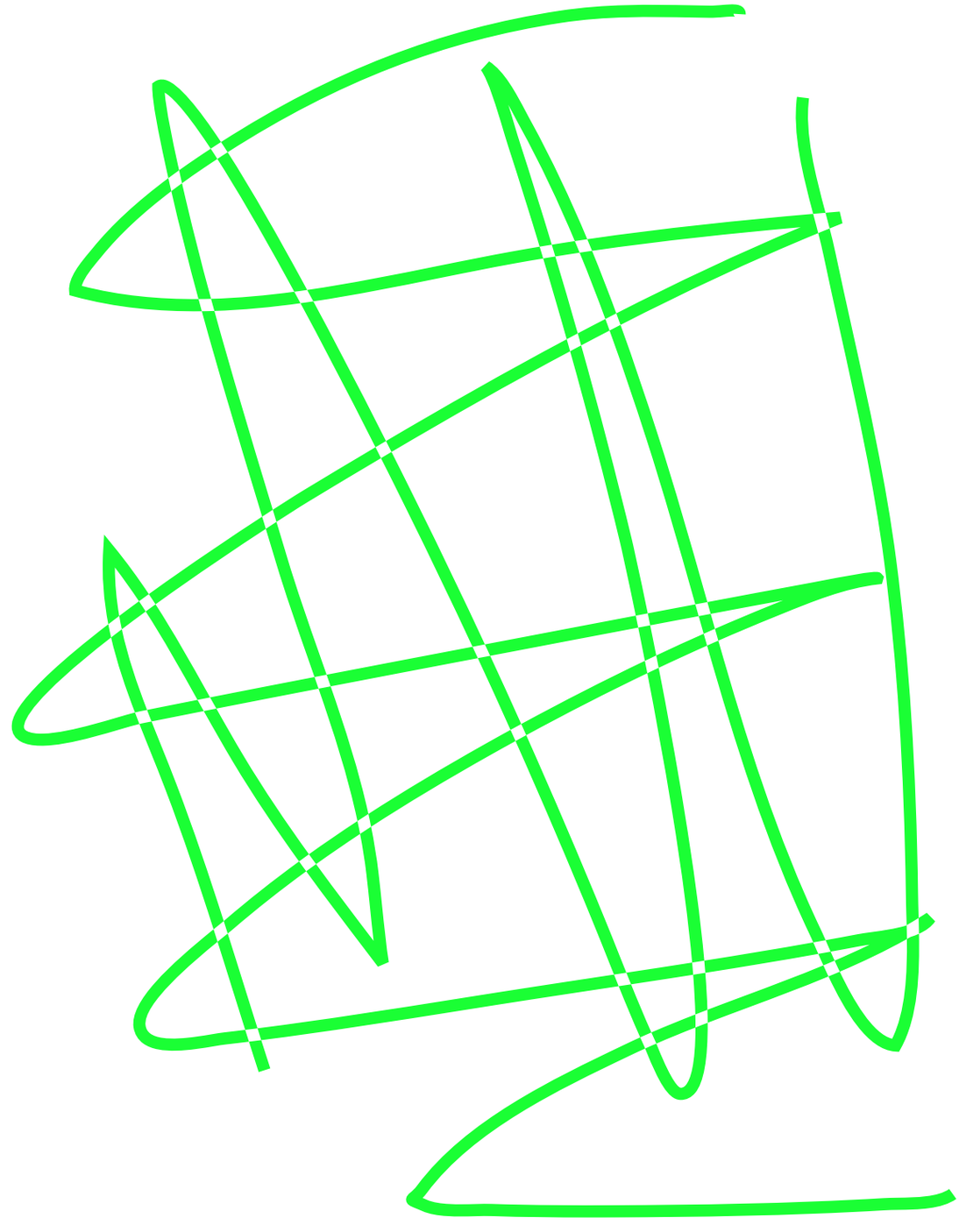
I started Paralaxe in 2014 with the idea of publishing books and making limited-edition tapes. When I first came to Barcelona, I fell into the free jazz scene, where people were home dubbing and exchanging tapes at zine fairs in squats, and concerts were being held in printing workshops. It was all very DIY. I was really into the scene, so that's how I got into tapes. I make limited-edition tapes, but not really that many each year, as my time is quite limited for obvious reasons. I don't run the label the way others might, with release schedules and planning or a label manifesto. I don't hold onto artists' masters or put music on DSPs; it's more about creating beautiful objects by artists I admire.

You've also created conceptual works, such as *Replica - Relic,* five custom-built instruments based on colonial acquisitions of Mesopotamian artefacts from the British Museum. Can you talk about this project?

The British Museum is one of the only places where I can access my heritage. This institution is a monument to British Colonialism, funded by the British government – which also funded the Iran-Iraq war that I escaped. I visited their gift shop once, where they were selling replicas for 2000 pounds. Not only are they showing off their imperial exploits, but they are continuing to profit from them. It really made me think about consent, access and gatekeeping of cultural heritage.

So, I decided to make my own replicas. I went to the British Museum on a busy day and followed a tour group. I took up to 500 pictures of certain artefacts on my phone. Using those pictures, along with photos from the museum's website, I was able to extrapolate and create 3D prints, which became moulds for ceramic replicas. These replicas have metal discs embedded in them that will generate electrical impulses on touch, which are then converted into MIDI signals. Essentially, they are ceramic samplers. Some of the replicas appear incomplete because the photos were taken of objects that are behind glass, so you can't get a full 3D view – but I like that. It's a reminder that there are both real and metaphorical barriers when it comes to accessing history and culture, and that a pervasive, imbalanced power dynamic still exists in that realm.

I'm hoping to debut *Replica - Relic* this year as an A/V show, where I will be playing the instruments and triggering manipulated samples to create a kind of alternate-reality soundscape, imagining how Southern Iraq might sound if it had never been adulterated by colonial interference. I'm working with Mau Morgó, a Catalan artist, who will be interpreting the work visually.



In October, you released a collaborative album with Portland-based guitarist Ilyas Ahmed entitled *Enough For Me To Remain*. Can you talk about this album?

Ilyas and I have both released on Geographic North, an experimental label based in Atlanta, and we've been circling each other's orbit for a while. He's an incredible guitarist. He sent me some guitar work that he had recorded on his iPhone, which became the framework for my voice. It was actually a very simple album to make, as we didn't really edit the guitar parts. They were already quite beautiful bones for songs, and I only wanted to gently layer a few additional elements to let everything breathe. The title of the album is 'Enough For Me to Remain,' which is taken from a poem by Palestinian writer Fadwa Tuquan.

What themes and subjects are important to you right now?

Big question. There are a few things on my mind right now. One is gradients, the in-between spaces and people. I just finished an album inspired by a particular flower that only blooms at night called the Japanese Snake Gourd flower, which I low-key became obsessed with. It's so beautiful and alien, but it only unfurls at night. I started to see parallels between this flower and people who operate and thrive in the in-between, and those people who, despite societal norms and regulations, bloom in the shadows. I work a lot of night shifts at the hospital and I see a flip side of society, a parallel ecosystem.

I've also been reading about decolonisation of music and the arts. I just watched this incredible lecture by Palestinian musician Sami Abu Shamays, who grew up in the States, studied Western classical music, but later returned to the Middle East to study Arabic music. I suppose this goes back to my thoughts about gradients – how European music exists on a strict Pythagorean 12-note scale, while a lot of other music exists on a gradient, with microtones, taking advantage of the in-between. Perhaps people are microtonal too, not always fitting the labels assigned to them or even the ones they assign to themselves.

Of course, I'm constantly thinking a lot about the Middle East, immigration, borders, covert power and cultural distortion. These issues are inextricably linked to who I am as an Arab and a war refugee. I recently picked up a book called *The Case for Open Borders* by John Washington after watching this lecture, which focuses mostly on immigration in the US but its arguments can be extrapolated to a more international context.

Lastly, I'm a doctor, so I naturally think a lot and read a lot about international public healthcare policies, but if I start talking about that, this interview will be about 10 pages long.

Finally, can you tell us about what you're working on at the moment and planning for this year?

I'm currently working on *Replica – Relic,* which is quite an intense process. Just today, I was in the ceramic studio of my friend Helena Civit Kopeinig, who is helping me create these instruments. At the same time, I'm composing the music and thinking about how this would translate into a live show. I'm always searching for samples that I can manipulate and shape into a body of work. Later this year, I'll be heading to EMS studios in Stockholm to work more on the composition, which I hope to turn into an album. I'm thinking of trying to tune their Buchla to a microtonal scale.

I'm also working on a performance called *objecto – territorio,* which I'll present at an art gallery (La Capella) in Barcelona in October. I'm collecting objects from different immigrant communities in Barcelona and will extract sounds from them during the performance, using sound as a dataset to map and define a space.

Next month, I have a collaborative tape coming out with Italian experimental duo Rosso Polare, and I have a solo record coming out in the latter half of the year, which is more art rock and trip-hop. I'm also working on a video for that record with my friends Valentina Alvardo Matos, an amazing Venezuelan experimental filmmaker, and Carolina Spencer, who creates incredible alien floral arrangements.

In between all that, I'll be going back to Australia to work as a doctor, with a couple of residencies splattered here and there, to be confirmed.

Photo Cecilia Diaz Betz
Originally published on February 9, 2025.

In flamenco, there's melancholy, but there's also joy and humour

Interview with
Fiesta en el vacío

Fiesta en el vacío is the title of a poem by Alejandra Pizarnik, and also the name of Luna María Cedrón's solo project. Initially purely instrumental, her music is constantly evolving. Lately, Luna has been integrating more and more flamenco elements into her music. Acoustic guitar, minimal rhythms, noisy samples – the whole is stripped back, leaving plenty of room for the vocals. She released a first album on the Simple Music Experience label and a second on Teenage Menopause.

How are you? Are you working on new music, or related stuff?

I'm working on my third album with a label called All Night Flight, and also collaborating with Chrüsimüsi Records of Switzerland. I'm shifting the direction of my project a bit – it's got more electric guitar now, it's less electronic, more minimalistic, maybe a bit more rock. I also need to play a lot because, well, I need to make a living.

On top of that, along with my friend Sara Lehad, who's an amazing experimental noise musician, I host a radio show on LYL Radio called *Filastin Alhura,* in which we aim to make the Palestinian genocide and colonisation visible within the experimental music scene.

Where are you right now?

I'm in France, in Brittany, where I live with my mother, my son and sometimes my brother.

Did you grow up where you are right now?

No, I'm not from here. I was born in Zaragoza, lived in Galicia, and then in Mexico with my mom and my brother Lazaro, who's Mexican. When I was nine, we moved to the Basque country on the French side. Later, at 17, I lived in Argentina, where I gave birth to my son. After that, I came back to France.

Do you feel that it has influenced you in what you do?

Absolutely. It's also because my mom is French and my dad was Argentinian. There's also the theme of exile – I'm the daughter of someone who was exiled during the Argentine dictatorship. My father left Argentina and never went back. It was such a trauma that he never returned, and at the same time, he was never able to get French nationality. A big part of my family had to leave, and the dictatorship caused a lot of family conflicts and separations, which made it difficult for the culture to be transmitted. My uncle is a well-known tango musician, but strangely, none of that musical heritage was passed down to me. So, it's not just about the culture that was passed down, but also the context in which it was shared. In a way my work talks about identity, how it's shaped by history, and how it's constantly being questioned.

You also draw from various genres from Spanish and Latin American culture, like flamenco and reggaeton.

When I started Fiesta en el vacío, I wasn't singing – I was just making electronic music. At the same time, I began making rap with my nephew. For me, it made sense to rap in Spanish. My friend, reggaeton and cumbia DJ, La Diabla, who is also French and Argentinian, and grew up on the French side of the Basque Country, just like I did, used to listen to a lot of reggaeton in clubs just across the border in Spain. Reggaeton has always been more popular there than in France. Reggaeton is huge worldwide now, but it wasn't as widely known 10 or 15 years ago. These cultural elements resonate with the fact that we're both half-Latina, and they became part of the way we express ourselves now. It's similar to how flamenco became part of my world through the Spanish influence in the south of France. We both take from what we have around us, from our respective surroundings.

When it comes to flamenco, I incorporate it into my solo project, but I actually prefer to sing with a guitarist and, when it's possible, for the dance. Flamenco is a music that connects you to other people in a very intense way.

I watched two films about the older generation of flamenco musicians, and both of them told rather sad stories.

The story of flamenco has many origins, and it is impossible to separate it from the persecution of the Gypsies, who faced racism in the past and continue to do so today. Flamenco scholar Faustino Núñez explains that flamenco emerged in the mid-19th century and developed in the theatres of Cádiz, where it became closely intertwined with dance. These early performances provide the first historical records of the *palos flamencos* (the distinct forms or styles of flamenco music).

According to Núñez, flamenco then became the music of the people – especially the Gypsies living in Cádiz. They would attend these performances, absorb the music, and then develop their own styles. There are many theories about the origins of flamenco, but one thing is particularly

striking about this one: for once, it's not the elite appropriating popular cultures to create a new successful style, but rather the people taking the culture produced by the elite (theatre culture) and making it their own, transforming it into something much more significant.

By the early 20th century, people who sang flamenco often did so simply to survive. Gypsies and *payos* (non-Gypsies) performed in *peñas* (flamenco clubs) and cafés to make a living. We tend to forget this survival aspect and focus only on the image of *la fiesta flamenca*, which, of course, is also part of the reality. While flamenco is often seen as traditional music, it's important to note that it didn't really exist in its current form until the mid-19th century.

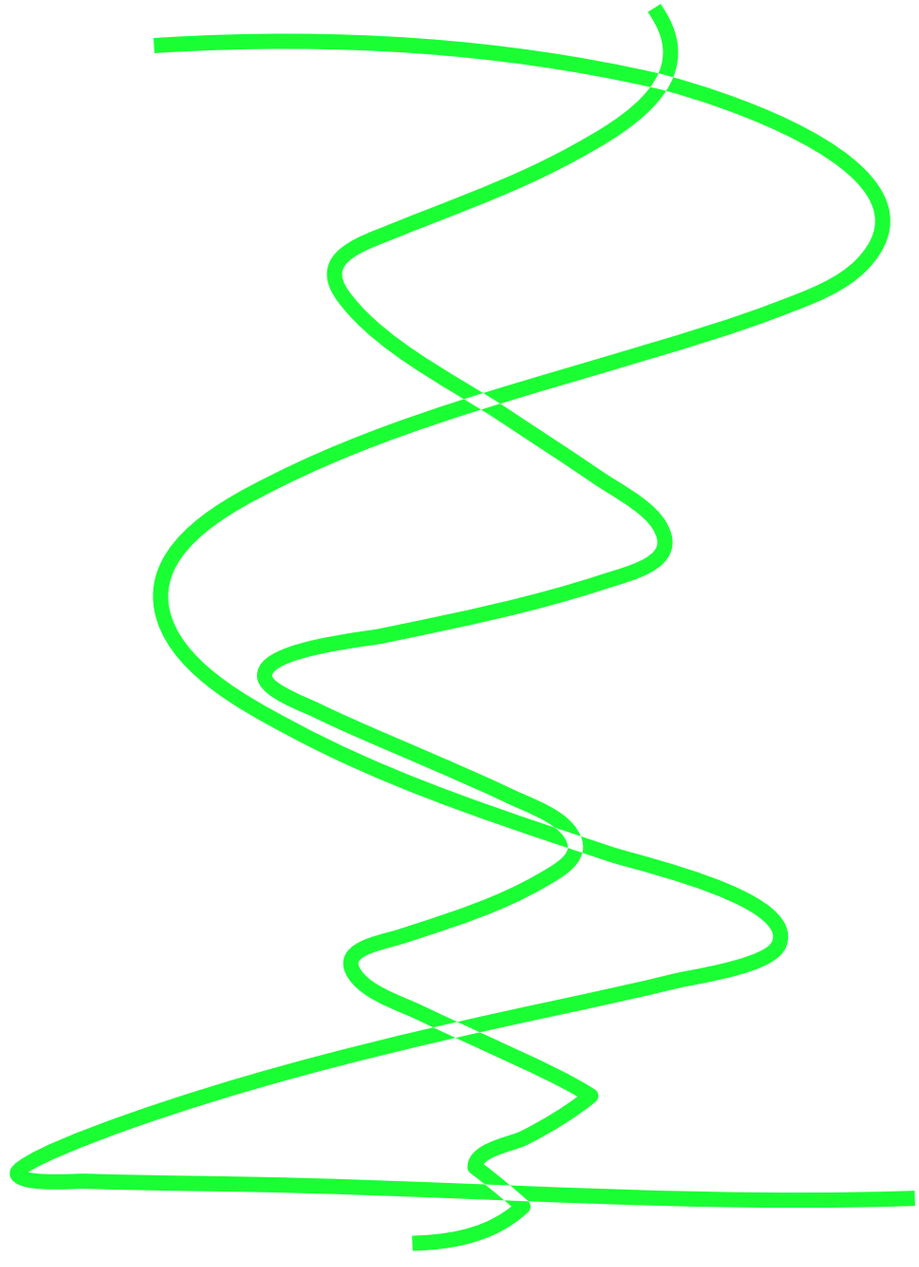
I worked hard to be able to study in Andalucía for a year, and during that year, I had the chance to play with incredible musicians. It was a really enriching experience. But when I got back to France, I found myself asking, 'What should I do with everything I learned now?' because in Brittany, where I live, flamenco isn't really present – it's the north of France.

At first, I thought that maybe I could find some people to play with regularly, but I'm in the countryside, very isolated, and it's also hard to find the time, especially since I tour a lot. So I decided, okay, let's just sing. I started making guitar loops and solo compás samples to sing over in a very simple way, respecting what I learned in Andalucía.

I've been deeply inspired by the singer Inès Bacán, and I was lucky enough to see her perform live in the Peña Torres Macarena. In an interview, she said that she doesn't understand why people feel the need to add something to flamenco-like mixing it with jazz or electronic music. In fact, she's worked with very experimental artists like Israel Galván, so she's not against changes, but she believes that interpreting *a cante* as it is, already makes it unique and different. So I decided just to sing, and the samples and loops are just a way to help me when there's no one to play with.

Even though I studied with teachers, the *cantaores* who passed this on to me expect me to sing it in public. For me, that's part of my response to the issue of appropriation. I've had a real connection with the people who taught me, and as long as I don't distort it, I think it remains flamenco. And, of course, as long as I'm not making a fortune from it...

That's also why I don't want to base my solo project entirely on flamenco – I don't feel I have the legitimacy to do that. There are so many professional cantaores in Andalucía who struggle to make a living from their music... well, like me at the moment with experimental



music. Even though we have the opportunity to have artist status in France, things are really hard at the moment because our proto-fascist government is cutting all the budgets for culture. People in Europe often think it's easier in France, because we're supposed to have plenty of social welfare, but the reality is far from that. Social welfare is gradually shrinking and disappearing, leading to social control.

There is also a distinctive atmosphere and a melancholy that are embedded in flamenco, but your music also has that vibe somehow.

Well, in flamenco, there's melancholy, but there's also joy, and humour. When I make my music, I try not to take myself too seriously, even though there's always a bit of melancholy. I can't take it away – it's part of the catharsis I guess. I've been singing the *Seguiriya*, a song that speaks of the pain of losing loved ones, but it also conveys anger, dignity, and resilience.

As for my compositions, the topics I explore aren't that varied. In the end, I always return to the same subject: social violence and gender-based violence. When I started my project, I thought I was writing love songs and breakup songs, but I eventually realised that most of them are about gender-based violence. Melancholy is part of the experience of violence – it's part of the complexity of feeling something for an aggressor, for example.

And it's also interesting because a lot of people assume that in more traditional music, the gender roles were more, let's say, traditional too. But the alternative scenes we're in are often not so much better.

Yes, that's true. There are many versions of patriarchy, and it evolves throughout history. I've been reading a lot about domestic violence, and in Western countries, for instance, physical violence was only criminalised in the 1970s (with laws like the 1978 *ordonnance* in France), while rape wasn't recognised as a crime until 1980, when it was reclassified as a serious criminal offense. In high society – experimental music included, because it's also quite a bourgeois scene – physical violence is now widely condemned. But there are still other ways to maintain patriarchy that don't rely on physical violence. For example, women continue to do unpaid work for men, what we call "reproductive labour," which can include sex, affection, domestic tasks, and many other things. In the 90s, a US social worker, Evan Stark, coined the term "coercive control" to describe a form of domestic violence that doesn't rely on physical violence but still involves manipulation, intimidation, and control. This form of abuse has only been criminalised recently. It's a modern, subtler way of performing capitalist patriarchy. And I know many educated guys, even ones who read bell hooks, who still use coercive control with their girlfriends.

What tools are available to protect ourselves on the scene?

I'm not sure we should be looking for tools for ourselves – we should be asking for justice, and the right to dignity. It's a political question and the answer needs to be political as well.

Last year, I shared a post on social media about the gender-based violence I've experienced in the music industry, particularly at shows and festivals. Since it happened while I was working, I felt I couldn't stay silent about it.

Since then, I've spoken to many women musicians who have faced similar experiences. What I've realised is that when we choose to speak out, we put ourselves at risk because we never know how people will react.

Of course, now we can speak up more easily, and more people are willing to believe us, but it's still incredibly overwhelming. You feel insecure, guilty for speaking out, some people support you, yes, while others insult you, most of the time they ignore you... There are still those who think we do it just to attract attention. Honestly, I would have preferred not to have to speak publicly. Once you do, you realise that there's no real support system in place. It's just us, as individuals, trying to get justice for ourselves. The only thing we can do for now is connect with each other as women musicians and speak out.

As a musician, I really don't feel I have the power to change anything on a structural level. Having all-female lineups is good, but it's not enough. The problem is structural, and it needs to be taken seriously by promoters and institutions. It's not about men having to deconstruct themselves to become better human beings.

We can't separate gender violence in the music scene from the broader issue of musicians' precarious working conditions and exploitation by the industry. These issues are deeply interconnected, and capitalist dynamics are present even in the experimental and DIY scenes.

Even if the situation has changed from before, when it felt impossible to say anything, the reality is, not everyone has the same opportunity to speak up about rape and gender-based violence. White, bourgeois women have more chances of being heard and believed – and they can afford therapy afterwards. What if you're poor, undocumented, have children, or if you are a kid who's been through incest? What if you are a person of colour? Speaking out in these cases is much riskier. Even if you do speak out, you might not be heard at all, simply because you're not in a position of power. You'll face more racism and misogyny, lose your job, or lose custody of your children – something that happens frequently to mothers in France in cases of father-child incest, where victims are often failed by the system. Many children remain unprotected, forced by courts or social services to continue living with their abusive fathers, their trauma ignored or minimised.

In France, victims of sexual and domestic violence are not properly supported. The state offers little to no help, and with the recent and future cuts to health and social budgets, it's not going to improve anytime soon. Women and kids who speak out, who try to find the help they need, face a system that is failing them. It's a huge issue that needs real political and social change. In this sense, European neoliberal and austerity policies play a significant role in exacerbating domestic and sexual violence.

Originally published on February 2, 2025.

If someone asks me to play at a rave, I'll do an ambi ent set

Interview with Drogded

Active in the Budapest DIY punk and noise scene since the late 2000s, his main artistic concepts revolve around sonic idiosyncrasy/ anarchism, rooted in improvisation and often accompanied by high volume/sound pressure, then possible tinnitus.

You have a lot of music projects and are active in many formations and bands. In SHAPE+, you are participating with your solo venture. Can you talk about Drogded and your other bands? In Drogded, you work with synths, whereas in the other bands you use more 'traditional' instruments, such as drums, etc.

What I do with other people or what I tend to do alone are, of course, on a spectrum of what I would like to do as a "soundmaker" (*bleh*, but better than saying I'm a musician).

All of my activities come from a basic playing-in-bands type of background, so working on music with people in a focused manner is a big part of how I think about music and making music in general. I won't list what I've done in the past, anyone can look that up, but it's totally okay for me to admit to myself that by now, it's a lot.

In a group, I love to be part of a barrage of sound – whether it's making any kind of noise, developing and practising different ideas compositionally, technically or sonically, or even working in the background as an engineer or producer.

On the other hand, when I'm alone I have way more freedom to do whatever the fuck I want. Of course, that comes with way more restrictions, as it's just me on my own, but the challenge of achieving or overcoming something I didn't or couldn't do in the past is what excites me the most.

I haven't made an oath to myself just yet, but I try not to do the same thing twice – at least not in a row. If I feel like doing harsh noise, but octophonic, then I do it. If I feel like playing Krautrock solo with all the instruments live, I won't ask anyone to jam with me. If someone asks me to play at a rave, I'll do an ambient set. If someone asks me to play at an ambient party (can you even call those parties?!), I do a speedcore session. It's not about ruining other people's fun or trying to stand out, it's about blending in in a fucked up way.

I never used modular synths – I never had that kind of money, haha. And I don't think I would dive into that now, either. But I really admire the architecture of it and I tend to use all sorts of different gear in a 'traditional'modular manner to achieve specific sounds and functions, for sure. I just like making music that's challenging for me and for the listener, too.

I remember a few years ago, when we had a SHAPE+ meeting at Terraforma festival, I was walking around Milan with a friend from another SHAPE+ member festival, and we got to one of the squats there, and suddenly you arrived in a van with other musicians you were touring with to play there. This is perhaps a very different way of operating to more traditional electronic music artists and DJs. What has the DIY punk/music scene taught you?

That's actually normal for me – playing in bands and touring. I'm more of an old-school band type of rando than someone who's known for being a solo artist. You can get away with calling it a tour, but in the end it's a Europe-wide vacation with your friends where you get to play music every night, get fed and hang out, and at the end call it a tour, haha. Of course, it's not that simple, it takes a lot of grinding and organising, but we still do it for the fun of it, not for the glory.

DIY is beautiful, probably the most motivating idea in my life, because it's self-sustaining in a way that's different from other things you usually associate with self-sustainment in general. It's a big fucking amount of teamwork among people who share interests and are able to help each other. If you give, you can ask, and vice versa – but it's not really a hard rule.

Talking about this scene, the next time I met you was at an airport; you were just coming back from playing in Copenhagen. This you do without having fancy booking agencies and whatnot, and you still manage to tour and play abroad more than many other musicians. Is the scene so very connected and global that you are able to play anywhere?

It's hard to answer, because 'the scene', or rather the subculture, is as connected as you try to be connected to it. Meaning, I struggle with booking myself, as I barely use social media, I'm not 'in the loop' that much anymore, and I don't really promote what I do (usually just the bare minimum) compared to others, who in my eyes are actually more like regular content creators than musicians.

Earlier, when I mentioned grinding, this is mainly what I meant – I basically 'live off of' the Erasmus exchange programme of punk and noise of some sorts. When somebody asks for or needs a show in Budapest and I'm able to help, I'll try my best, and when I go their way, I'll drop them a line and hope for the best.

Back in the day, when there were far fewer ways to 'communicate' and promote your music, it felt way more comfortable for me because there was much

less signal-to-noise ratio in terms of finding good people or communicating with others. If you made good music, someone would write to say they'd like to promote it in some way, and a few months later you'd get your few tapes or vinyls and that was it. Now it feels more like bands and artists produce one song and try, or rather hope, for the best so that the algorithm shines on them so they can get a cheque. Not for me. I don't even have that many proper releases anymore, because besides making music, running a label is too much of a hassle, and I don't really send promos or demos to friends with labels either. But apart from me, yes, it's very well connected if you put in the work.

Besides being a musician, you were also involved in several Budapest-based independent culture and music venues – like Gólya and Kripta – which were operating on a collective basis. Can you talk about this more organisational aspect of your work?

Working with others is very important for me. And I mean full caps WORKING. I guess it comes from my background and socially/politically aware upbringing (thanks, parents!), but I could never manage to survive in a job where I felt like just another cog in some bullshit factory machine. So when I went to be a sound guy at the old Gólya, I felt very much in my element. It was proper, honest work that we did for ourselves, and it felt great to be 'off grid' from all the other shitty places where you could make music or work. Gólya is a hardcore cooperative, in the classic sense, so it was necessary to get involved and understand how you organise other people's work and your own – and I learned a lot.

On the other hand, Kripta is way looser and is rather a collective. Both places are self-made and self-sustaining, but on a totally different basis. Gólya is a proper job and Kripta is what people would expect when you tell them you are a punk and you have a huge rehearsal room that others can visit sometimes.

An obvious question that comes to mind relates to politics, especially if we are talking about Hungary, where alternative culture has to function de facto without any state funding, mostly by choice, though there's probably not much of a choice. Gólya and Kripta are both quite political spaces, can you talk about this?

It's hard not to be political these days, haha. I mean, I don't understand when people don't care about what the fuck is going down around us. Sometimes, I feel as if everything you do or say these days needs to make a political point in order to keep things in check – well at least that's how it is for me, so I can sleep at night.

Everybody knows that Hungary is a shit place (but it's the best place), with a horrendous government (but where isn't there?) – not just this one, but all the ones before it. It's nothing new; it's partly the reason why people think of Hungarians as weirdos with a fucked-up sense of humour and attitude – and of course an alien-sounding language, but that's not even their fault.

Someone started a review of one of my bands' latest LPs with something like 'shit governments breed good punk bands' and unfortunately, that seems about right. That's why places with people who are fed up and actually stand up to make a difference feel so out of place or extreme, even though we're not shitting Spanish wax (i.e. doing something extraordinary – it's a Hungarian saying, I swear), we're just doing the same thing that everyone else in social centres, squats and other activism-fuelled places do in other countries, but perhaps as a Sisyphean uphill race or something, all under the radar so nobody tries to ruin your oasis in the middle of this tornado of diarrhoea and glass shards we call daily life.

Being part of the DIY underground music scene, but now also SHAPE+, which is a publicly funded platform, how do you perceive these seemingly different worlds of running music projects?

I quit my job recently after many years to focus solely on music full-time. It's pretty new for me – being out in the wild with no knowledge of how to actually survive by either making music for myself, or helping others create and/or archive their own sonic endeavours. I don't think I'm leaving the underground to get famous with something that is publicly funded, but at least I'm not doing the same thing in Hungary, where I'd have to grovel for a few cents that've been taken out of other people's pockets, or funds that they should be using to renovate our schools or hospitals. [To Hungarian musicians who live off government funding: I have nothing against you, *semmi személyes*.]

It's also something I've never tried before, but it feels empowering: being able to travel to other places and play music for people who most likely wouldn't know about me otherwise because I'm shit at promoting myself, haha – full circle!

How do you see your future as a musician / music organiser / music activist?

It's going to be fine. I don't have a lot to lose, except my dignity, I guess? Deep breath ~~~

Originally published on November 17, 2024.

I tend to make music that isn’t easy to dance to

Interview with Assyouti

Born and raised in Egypt's crowded and chaotic capital Cairo, Assyouti is among his generation's most distinctive DJs and producers. Juggling hypermodern bass mutations, warped dancefloor snaps and percussive club experiments, he draws energy from the tumultuous environment in which he grew up, channelling it into refined productions and elegant selections.

Can you tell us about your background? What led you to active musicianship and DJing?

It started with me DJing in my room during high school, either for friends or just for myself, then at some local house parties. That led to recording mixes and uploading them to SoundCloud, which eventually turned into doing podcasts for platforms I was following at the time, and from there, playing gigs in Cairo. It was a hobby at first, something I did in my spare time. Things shifted when I moved to Paris to study fine art. I went in thinking I'd focus on that, but within a couple of months, I realised that music was what I wanted to dedicate myself to. That's when it became more serious.

The sounds you play and produce are broken and twisted – in a good way – with plenty of bass, but also eerie synth pathways. Can you talk about your 'sound' – the sounds you gravitate to in terms of production and DJing – and whether there is a difference for you between what you play and what you produce, in terms of sonic aesthetics.

I don't really have a plan when I start producing. It's more about experimenting with sounds and rhythms until an idea takes shape in my head. It's a lot of trial and error. That makes it hard to define what I gravitate towards because it's not premeditated – it's more of a feeling than a thought-out process. When it comes to DJing, it's a different context. My sets don't always match my productions, but I like to keep both unpredictable. In my DJ sets, I like to go through many twists and turns, making them feel disorienting yet coherent at the same time. This sometimes bleeds into my productions as well.

When you produce, do you have the dancefloor in mind, too? Or is it more abstract and creative in terms of artistic expression?

I don't really have the dancefloor in mind, but I do have the club in mind. I tend to make music that isn't easy to dance to, which is the kind of music I most enjoy hearing in a club. The tracks that get me going the most are the ones that I don't really know how to move to – even if they're highly rhythmic. The ones that bring you to the point where you're so mentally engaged with the sounds that you're completely focused on them and you're not really dancing. It's more of a mental and emotional conversation than a physical one. I think that's the kind of conversation I'm trying to create with my music... That's one side of me – the other side just wants everyone to lose their shit and jump around too.

What are your inspirations – they don't have to be purely musical?

Lately, I've found a lot of inspiration in films. My debut album is actually centred around film sampling. One day, while watching a Kurosawa film, I realised that a lot of the films I spend my time watching have really interesting sounds that could be used in music, so I started recording bits that caught my ear while I watched. I built a track around these samples after processing them, and it felt like the samples shaped the music in a new way, adding an entirely new layer. It turned out quite different from my other music – more captivating. It became less about me as the sole creator and more like a collaboration between the film's audio and my own work. That's the approach I took for the entire album; it's almost finished now.

How do you feel about the state of the world of music and culture at the moment?

There's definitely a sense of repetition right now. I feel like a lot of producers are starting to sound the same, chasing trends, and it's affecting the scene. Labels push certain sounds, and that influences what gets booked, so the same trends dominate. The audience ends up getting stuck in this cycle, and there's less room for variety. But I also see people getting tired of it, and I think more artists and listeners are pushing back, looking for something more genuine. I've had a lot of conversations recently with others who feel the same way. I hope that means we'll see a shift soon.

What does the near future have in store for you?

I'm wrapping up my album and getting ready to bring it to life with an AV project, which I'm super excited about. Plus, I'm diving into a new collaborative project that's been in the works. It's still early days, but it's definitely something I'm looking forward to sharing.

Photo Mariam Mekiwi
Originally published on September 22, 2024.

Between luminous landscapes and darker realms

Interview with Lamina

Lamina is the moniker of Brussels-based French artist Clarice Calvo-Pinsolle. In Basque mythology, the term refers to a half-human, half-animal spirit that dwells in the forest. Essentially a nocturnal creature, it lives in caves and close to water sources and creeks. Similarly, Lamina's music is swampy and growling, an ever-evolving and living imaginary ecosystem. Textures, effects and field recordings blend seamlessly to create these personal landscapes. She has released albums on Complex Holidays, Mus Joutra, Wabi-Sabi, Orila, with her first vinyl release set to come out on Twin System.

How have you been, Clarice? What occupies your mind these days?

To be honest, a lot is on my mind right now, and I'm feeling deeply ambivalent about everything that's happening politically and the idea of continuing to make music and art. I'm going through intense periods of questioning, where it sometimes feels impossible to keep creating art with everything that's going on, even though deep down, I know that creative spaces are also spaces of resistance, and they're so important for building new things, new ways of living, communities, and different ways of seeing the world. But I struggle to keep that in mind sometimes. I'm trying to stay positive.

How and when did you start making music? Do you recall the initial impetus that led you to active music-making – a transition of sorts from being a listener to becoming a creator?

I used to make music as a child but stopped. It wasn't until art school that I started experimenting with sound again, initially through installations, and, over the years, sound gradually took on a more important role – whether through the instruments I created for my installations or compositions based on field recordings.

I've been building a sound archive for years and wanted these sounds to exist beyond my installations, in more performative contexts. The transition into music was a long process, I didn't feel legitimate, like many women in the music industry. I struggled to imagine that all these sounds I had collected could exist as music in their own right, and it was overwhelming.

Then a friend invited me to do a live performance. I had never done one before. Someone lent me a machine, and that's how it all started – about five or six years ago. I think being thrown into the situation and agreeing to do a live set before having a live set prepared really pushed me to take a leap and fully embrace making music, which allowed me to experiment with less rigid structures.

My environment in Brussels also played a huge role. Being immersed in a community of musicians was incredibly inspiring for me. Seeing women perform live, in particular, made me realise it was possible, and that gave me a lot of strength and inspiration.

Lamina, your artist moniker, refers to Basque mythology "a nocturnal creature that is a half-human, half-animal spirit that dwells in the forest". Can you talk about why you chose this moniker and how it expresses what you do?

Indeed, this creature lives in forests, near caves, or water sources, and it has no gender, it is half-human, half-animal.

I was born and raised in Bayonne, in the French Basque Country, where mythology is deeply present. There are many rites, customs, and folktales involving various creatures and witches. It's important to note that in the Spanish Basque Country, the Inquisition in the 17th century led to a significant witch hunt, in other words, femicides. As a result, Basque mythology is full of stories of witches and other mystical figures.

As I delved deeper into Basque mythology, I discovered the Lamina around the same time I was starting my music project, and it immediately resonated with me. It's as if, through my music, I'm trying to create habitats, ecosystems, and, above all, shelters for the Lamina and all the other creatures – sometimes in aquatic environments, sometimes in marshlands, sometimes in forests. It moves between luminous landscapes and darker realms; places where it can exist, hide, and dance. These are always deeply organic ecosystems that echo nature.

Water seems to play an important role in your work – as also seen in your latest album, *Sueños Acuáticos.* Can you talk about the importance of the aquatic?

I've been surrounded by water since childhood. I grew up just five minutes from the Atlantic Ocean and spent eight years doing synchronised

swimming. Water has always been a very present and important element in my life – it's the place where I feel most at peace.

I often use water as a metaphor to understand my own emotions, my fluctuations, and my energy. Sometimes I need calmer, more fluid periods, like a stream, while at other times, I go through phases where my energy feels like massive waves, and I need a lot of movement and agitation. Then the tide recedes, and the cycle continues.

I'm very interested in hydrofeminism and the research of Astrida Neimanis *(Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology)*, who sees human bodies as extensions of aquatic systems. I deeply relate to her perspective. Water is an element of connection, a connection to oneself, to others, to the more-than-human world, and to ecosystems. Our water bodies are intrinsically linked to all bodies of water.

As Neimanis explains, our bodies are not fixed or autonomous entities but are rather flows in constant interaction with their environment. Our bodily fluids connect us to oceans, rivers, clouds, and other forms of life. The water flowing through us today has existed in other forms before; it has passed through other bodies, other histories, carrying a memory of its circulation.

I like to view things through the lens of water: things evolve, circulate, transform, and remain interconnected. Even when water stagnates, there is always an eventual movement. Nothing is fixed.

Water is a recurring element in my music, and interestingly, most of the aquatic sounds I use are not actual recordings of water. In my installations, water is used as a sonic element to create instruments or as a means of circulation, connecting one sculpture to another.

It's also interesting how you compare water to sound, the fluidity of their movement and how they take shape. Can you talk about sculpting your sound?

The process that interests me most when making music is shaping the sounds I record – finding ways to give them form, movement, and texture. I love the idea that a sound can be almost visible and tangible – something deeply sensory that can pass through us and we can feel its movement and materiality.

I see sounds as materials, much like when I work with ceramics, metal, or other physical media. I try to shape them and sculpt them by adding and removing material. It's very similar with sound: I use software, effects, and machines that allow me to reshape the sounds, giving them a more organic, almost living quality. Sometimes, I also use objects to diffuse the sounds within them, altering their colour and making them resonate with the material of the object itself.

When I create music, I like to imagine sounds as creatures, wandering and encountering each other. Once, during a hypnosis journey, I had a vision that deeply materialised this idea. I felt my ribcage as a cave, and as I went inside, I saw drops of water falling, I could feel them, hear them resonate inside my body. Little by little, these drops started to dematerialise, splitting into many tiny fragments-like a granular effect – before transforming into insects. It was incredibly beautiful, and I think it perfectly represents the way I perceive the sounds I use.

You also work with field recordings quite extensively – how do you approach these ready-made sounds?

As I mentioned earlier, I've been accumulating a large collection of recorded sounds over the years, using both microphones and my phone. I have to admit, I'm not very demanding when it comes to recording quality. I rework these sounds on my computer using software called Cecilia, along with other tools that allow me to transform them.

For me, recording sounds is my favourite way to remember the places I visit. I can recall exactly where I recorded each sound – it's like a kind of photo album, but through sound.

You're based in Brussels, which has an interesting music scene. Can you talk about it?

Yes, I've been living in Brussels for five years, and the music scene here has been a huge source of inspiration for me. There are concerts happening all the time, sometimes even multiple on the same night. It's incredibly rich and intense. Venues open, others close, but there's always this artistic energy, and a sense of community and collectivity. A lot of people put in the effort to organise events and keep the DIY scene alive.

When I first arrived, seeing that organising something was possible, even with little to no resources, really inspired me.

Things are evolving, but I still find the scene to be very male-dominated and insular, with persistent issues of sexism and violence. There are spaces where problematic things happen, lineups that are still predominantly male, and a general lack of inclusivity.

Some collectives are working to bring change to the music scene and alternative spaces. They try to support survivors, create spaces for healing,

and build safer environments. But unfortunately, it's still not enough. These issues must be addressed collectively – not just by those directly affected, who are already exhausted from fighting for change, healing from harm, and confronting everyday violence. Change needs to happen at a structural level.

What awaits you in the coming months?

I have several projects in the works. Right now, I'm finishing work on an installation created in collaboration with my friend Roxane Rajic, which we'll be presenting in Bourges, France, as part of an exhibition.

I'm also working on a larger installation project called "Symphonie d'une combustion", which is an instrument I've been developing for several years, involving water, heat, temperature sensors, and more. I'll be presenting this project in 2026.

Apart from that, I have upcoming concerts and performances in France, Italy, and Belgium.

Photo Moritz Richter
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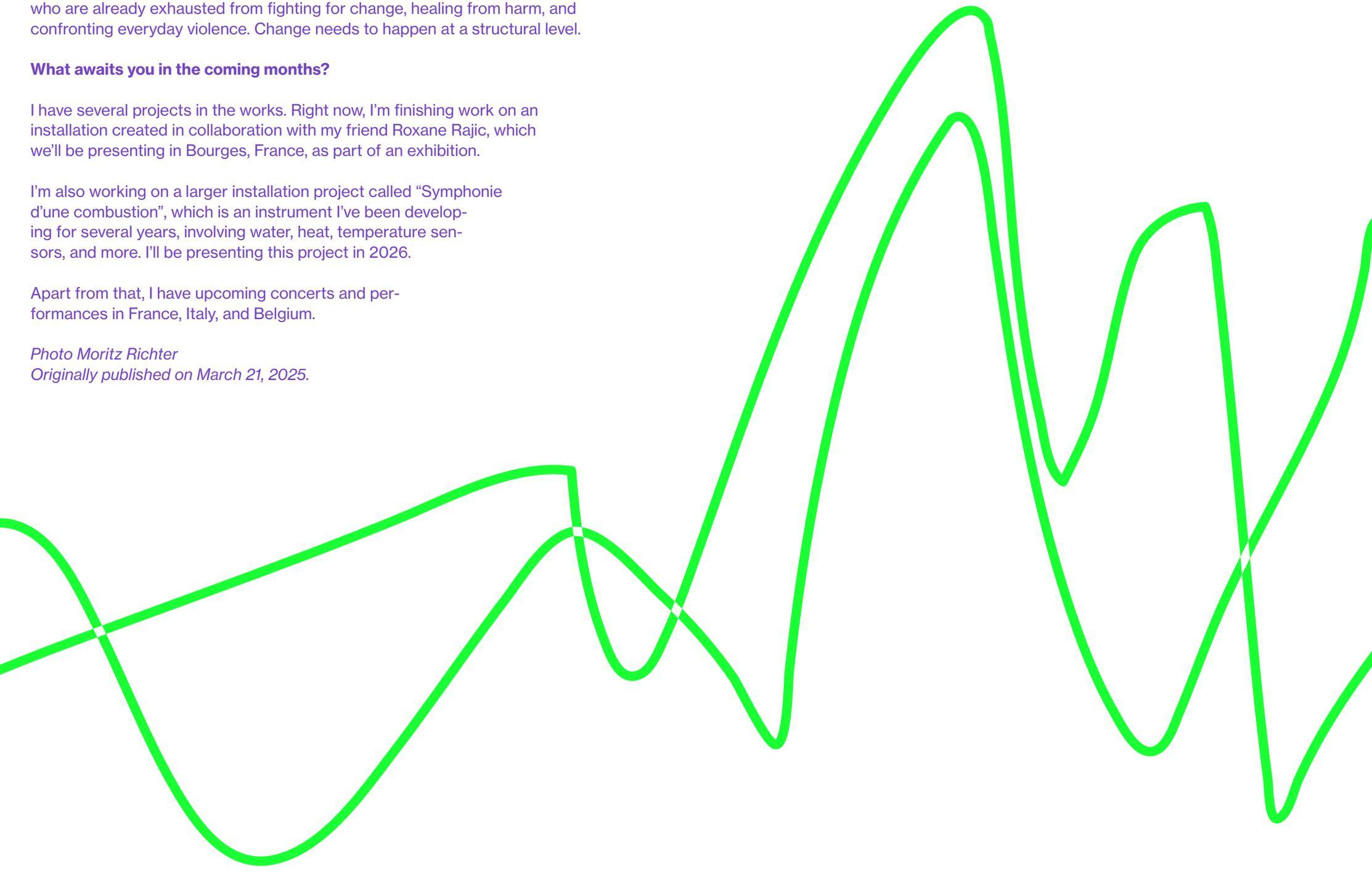


There's a feeling of solidarity that hasn't been here before

Interview with Lenhart Tapes

Lenhart Tapes is a one-man cassette tape manipulator, best known for his striking and unforgettable live performances. Yes, Walkmans are his musical instruments, and he creates live mixes of selected material from his cassette collection, layering them over rhythmic loops.

Where are you right now?

I'm in Belgrade.

How have you been?

We've been attending the protests. We have hope in our students.

Is the cultural scene involved in any way?

Yes. Almost all the universities are involved, and I don't know many cultural spheres that are not connected in some way. Across the board, there's a feeling of solidarity that hasn't been here before.

You come from a Slovak minority area in Vojvodina, northern Serbia. Can you talk about your background, particularly in terms of multilingual and multi-ethnic aspects, and how you got into music?

It goes a little bit further back into history than Serbia. I grew up in the former Yugoslavia as part of the Slovak minority living there, and those are my earliest memories. Today, there are around 30,000 Slovaks living in Serbia. I come from a small community that managed to preserve its cultural heritage brought from Slovakia when our ancestors arrived in this area 250 years ago. This heritage has had a big influence on me – Slovak was my mother tongue, and the music of Slovaks living in Yugoslavia at the time shaped my experience of music. I'm still researching these traditions for inspiration.

Yugoslavia had a pretty vibrant alternative scene in the 70s and 80s. Has this had an influence on you?

Of course. I must add that the main difference between Yugoslavia and Serbia is that Yugoslavia was much larger, with many more small communities living within one big country. Back then, we were all Yugoslavians first – and proud to be so. But with the rise of nationalism in the 90s, everybody was trying to figure out where they belonged. That's the root of the main problem today, a kind of nationalist politics reminiscent of the 90s that still persists among many small communities across the Balkans. But this issue is very emotional for me at this moment, given what's happening in our country right now.

That being said, I'm very proud of the heritage of the Yugoslav underground scene – not just in music, but also in the broader impact of Yugoslavian art, extending all the way from the 1960s. It shaped me more than my native heritage, which I didn't like so much when I was a kid. All the traditions and customs. I was much more into rebellious stuff. When you're young, you're not really interested in traditions. We were more into movements coming from the bigger cities in Yugoslavia. Every major city in Yugoslavia had its own trademark scene, so to speak. We knew which kind of bands came from Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana, or Skopje. In a way, you could compare it to the American scene, where you can recognise the sounds coming from Boston or California. For instance, in Macedonia, they had this dark, electronic, esoteric music scene – experimental stuff mixed with Byzantine melodies. Belgrade was heavily influenced by the New Wave, Zagreb had punk, Ljubljana was known for its art rock, Sarajevo had alternative folk, and so on.

In your Lenhart Tapes project, you also draw from the Balkan music scene, the forgotten tapes that you find in various flea markets and other places. It could be described as a sort of sonic archaeology project – an ethnomusical gonzo research project of sorts.

I've always been interested in small communities living in this region, maybe because I'm part of one myself. I've been interested in finding hidden stuff. A lot of these communities keep their musical traditions to themselves without sharing them widely, much like the community I come from. For instance, the Goran minority living in Kosovo or the Ruthenian minority in Vojvodina... But I'm also interested in other cultures and their musical heritages. I started this 'musical archaeology' for myself first of all, and eventually, some of those melodies ended up in my music.

When you work with these sources, on tapes, you recontextualise them and create something entirely new from them.

Sometimes I sample from the original tapes, and sometimes I collaborate with vocalists, with whom I occasionally perform and record, to re-sing the material. These are singers who work with ethnic music styles and have backgrounds in academia, research or music. I like finding these juxtapositions between noise and ethnomusic. Sometimes we rearrange entire songs. When I work alone, I sample from tapes or from my sampler.

Why cassettes?

That's basically down to my dilettantism when sampling – I don't know how to sample from other devices. (laughs) Tapes are something that I grew up with. As a kid, I experimented with tapes by cutting them and chopping them up. I never gave up on tapes as a format and I continue to listen to music on tape recorders. Recently, I discovered that there are different types of tape recordings and machines capable of reproducing music in unconventional ways, allowing you to manipulate them a bit. This opened up new possibilities for me in terms of composition. Though I can't really say that I'm composing music – maybe making music is a better description.

Could you talk about how you work with these tapes in terms of making music or performing?

There are a few methods that I use. Some of them are ready-made objects, and there's a lot of spoken word material that I use too. Others I prepare on my computer, recording them in a way that I know allows for later manipulation.

Recently, I've been using old tape machines – something between musical cassette players and devices that are not intended for commercial use. They were originally designed for producing audio books for blind people. I managed to find some of these old machines, which are no longer used because everything is digital now. I've found a bunch of them at flea markets and I'm still collecting them. These are my musical instruments, which I use rhythmically – stopping, speeding up and slowing down.

You also perform live with a vocalist.

Yes, I use a digital sampler as well, and I perform live with guests. The Lenhart Tapes project is occasionally a duo or trio, especially during live performances.

You have also been part of other musical projects and bands.

Yes. Usually experimental noise rock music. That's my musical background. I come from loud music. It's in my blood.

With Lenhart Tapes you're also part of the global music scene, performing at related events. Could you talk about the two musical worlds you've been part of?

It actually came as a surprise to me, as it was never my intention to become part of the global music scene. I appreciate it and listen to a lot of artists who are categorised as such, but I wasn't aiming to become part of it. I never studied music, nor was I an exceptional musician. I'm more of a music lover.

Why do you think you have been placed in the global music scene? Is it because of all the various tapes and samples you use?

I didn't expect the world music scene to embrace what I do because it's full of dirty noise. I even sample industrial machines, for instance. It's just a sound, an element to build music with. I've always felt very comfortable in the noise music category because it's my home ground. In the world/global music sphere, I feel more like a guest.

What are you mostly occupied with right now?

I'm working on new stuff. I've always liked experimental music; it inspires me the most. I want to go deeper and deeper into it. I want to surprise myself.

I remember back in the day when we first met, you were working as a cultural journalist. Is that still your job?

I still work in media, but now as a video editor.

How's the music scene in Belgrade right now?

It's very vivid. It reminds me of the days when I was an active part of the scene. Now I'm mostly doing studio stuff and only occasionally playing live. The scene is very lively in so many ways. There's been a revival of the good old punk rock and hardcore music scenes; the experimental stuff never really went away. I find the scene very inspiring, even though the times are almost as hard as in the 90s. When you look back at the 90s, when the times were the hardest, paradoxically, these were some of the best years for music in Serbia. Music served as some sort of escape from reality.

Do you have hope for a better future?

I have hope for a better future – that's why I'm still in Serbia. That said, I'm not entirely sure anymore, I'm still processing what's been happening recently in the country. But I do have hope in the youth here.

Photo Aleksa Savulov
Originally published on March 30, 2025.

Extended mind-body listening is my favourite state of being

Interview with
Manja Ristić

Manja Ristić, is a classically educated violinist, sound artist, published poet, curator, and researcher. Her sound-related research focuses on contemporary performance in the field of instrumental electroacoustics, as well as on interdisciplinary approaches to sound and field recording and experimental radio arts. Ristić has created commissions for Kunstradio – Radiokunst, Radio Cona, Semi-Silent, Radiophrenia, Radio Art Zone, Radia. FM, Framework Radio, and all the national broadcasting agencies across SE Europe. The winner of several distinctive awards for solo and chamber classical music, she received an honourable mention in the Phonurgia Nova Awards, and a Golden Award for Extended Media from the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia. She is a founding member of CENSE – the Central European Network for Sonic Ecologies. We caught up with Manja to talk about growing up in the war-torn ex-Yugoslavia of the 1990s, listening, and her life on the Croatian island of Korčula.

"Classical music structured my musical being." You said in an interview. You had a classical music education, having studied at the Belgrade Music Academy and the Royal College of Music in London. Many experimental musicians who have had a classical education experience a certain turning point where they have to somehow distance themselves from the classical music world. What was your turning point?

To be perfectly honest, I don't think I ever distanced myself from classical music; life circumstances forced me to change my practice at some point. Before embracing sound art as my main path, I had been running on parallel tracks for almost 15 years, being active as a classical music performer, giving solo recitals, playing chamber music, and in numerous ensembles and orchestras, while at the same time developing my improvisational practice, experimenting with electroacoustics, performing in experimental formations and composing for theatre. The sudden loss of my mother when I was 28 drastically shifted my priorities, and not long after that I became a mother myself. Little by little, the demands of maintaining a classical music career couldn't be met, and it gradually began to fall out of the picture.

Today I am a single mum of a wonderful autistic boy, which is a very special task and a 'mould' that shapes both my life and my career. The reason I am putting this here is to combat stigma and to give some visibility to families like mine.

A rigorous classical music education prepared me extremely well for this role. But I still have a strong desire to revive my classical music performance. I am also fully aware that it is highly unlikely to ever happen, and my focus is really on trying to maintain the creative hybrid of my past and present practices. There is a lot I have learned from multimedia, experimental music, especially improvisation, conceptual art, radio art and listening practices that have been able to apply to classical music interpretation, and vice versa – there is a lot of musical knowledge from my extensive classical training that I have been able to incorporate into sound-related arts. Integration has always been my goal, not distancing. To somehow transform all these divided musical Manjas into one genre-ambiguous shapeshifter.

What I have distanced myself from in relation to the classical music milieu is elitism, discrimination, the grooming and the clan-building of famous music teachers, orchestras, agencies and schools, and all the things that were/are deeply oppressive and damaging to both the individual and the culture. Luckily, times are changing, and classical music is more accessible, more open, safer and is even becoming innovative. But I am quite happy to have found my own way through the jungle.

You came of age in Belgrade during the 90s. This was a turbulent and dark period, marked by the Balkan Wars and the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Milošević regime. How did this period influence your formative years, and what impact did art and culture have on you at the time?

As for what is generally regarded as the lost childhood of my generation, I belonged to a privileged group of kids who were very well taken care of through a comprehensive musical education and who were partially spared the direct effects of the war. In addition to my parents, who did everything to protect me, I was also raised by incredible music pedagogues. Nevertheless, the consequences of the war and trauma inflicted on children were unavoidable. Like many Yugoslavs, I come from a mixed marriage and have close cousins in almost all parts of the former Yugoslavia. My brother was just old enough to join the army when the war started, as was my first cousin on the Croatian side; they were almost forced to fight each other on the same front. Other close family members I grew up with were besieged in Sarajevo. My mum's family was cut off on a Croatian island, some of my closest friends lost their older siblings, society crumbled, embargoes stripped us down to bare survival and Belgrade became a mecca for criminals, arms and drug dealers, exposing the youth to rapid cultural devaluation, all kinds of addictions, the degradation of values and ultimately poverty. All these stresses and strains marked my childhood and formative years, so music education really had a therapeutic role, and it was a cleverly placed distraction. A decade of cultural isolation and the sharp and instant division of the Yugoslavian public sphere still has terrible consequences 30 years later.

I think my parents and my teachers were constantly looking for an opportunity for me to continue my education abroad, so I was sent away for short periods of time. To London when I was 15, to Vienna towards the end of the bombing of Belgrade in 1999.

Apart from the classical music education, which was a kind of shield, another community that had a significant protective role was the techno scene. In my teenage years, the Belgrade Academy of Music was an uncongenial place. Rigid and hostile. Many young people of my generation found solace in clubbing. And there were also the first anti-war protests, then the student protests of 96-97. Prolonged fighting on the streets over the course of a harsh winter. Every day, instead of going to the Academy, we would march, organise, build solidarity campaigns from scratch. It was during this time that my critical thinking and affinity for activism began to take shape.

The impact of growing up in a crumbling society and being exposed to the trauma of war, an embargo and Milošević's dictatorship, gave my generation a certain resilience – some of us

are very efficient in survival mode and have distilled political instincts. Unfortunately, this way of living has lifelong consequences, so I can safely say that most of us have some form of PTSD.

My dad saved the boots I wore on many protests and marches as a young girl; he turned them into flowerpots.

Yugoslavia has a rich history of transgressive art and culture, embracing progressive ideas and art forms throughout its history, often in transdisciplinary fields. Artists like Katalin Ladik, Borghesia, IRWIN, the queer art and music scene in Ljubljana in the 1980s, etc. Was this cultural legacy something that inspired you?

Yes, I was deeply influenced by Katalin's work, especially her performance poetry. The Slovenian scene of the 80s – not really, I was too young, but I got close to the Slovenian scene much later and specifically the sound-related one. Some of my Slovenian colleagues were directly responsible for the development of my field recording practice – Brane Zorman and Irena Pivka from Cona Zavod.

The war and post-war queer scene of Belgrade – in the late 90s and for almost a decade after, had a deep impact on me, and I proudly consider myself a part of it.

The Yugoslavian performers and artists who deeply influenced my early compositional, conceptual and experimental development were the composer and diva of the new wave band Luna – Jasmina Mina Mitrušić, and the mathematician and visual artist Marica Radojčić. Both were massive pillars of knowledge and support in my formative years. Later, the incredible influence of the cultural anthropologist and interdisciplinary researcher Sonja Leboš from Zagreb, with whom I still love to work closely.

The person who indirectly influenced my perception of art production, criticism and curation was the magnificent Dunja Blažević. Old-school composers I looked up to were Ljubica Marić and Ludmila Frajt. Not a man to be seen, I just noticed.

What is the importance of listening in your work? It is often assumed that musicians are on the other side - facilitating the listening experience, rather than listening themselves. Some musicians only go to other musicians' concerts if they themselves are performing.

In the last few years I have put a significant effort into developing a listening experience that engages deeper intuition and involves sensory ecologies. I am also obsessed with the phenomenology of sound

and listening, the energetic properties of sound, the complexities of psychology, the physiology of listening and the physics of sound.

The development of musicality does not necessarily mean the development of listening skills and affinities. But I do believe that the development of listening techniques is the basis for any form of musicianship. Simply because sound operates within subtle layers of one's psyche, it affects brain functions, it can have a profound emotional impact, and it can become part of a bodily memory. Not to mention the possible socio-cultural impact and imprint on collective memory.

I'm one of those who see listening as a transformative act, and working with sound as a highly responsible job.

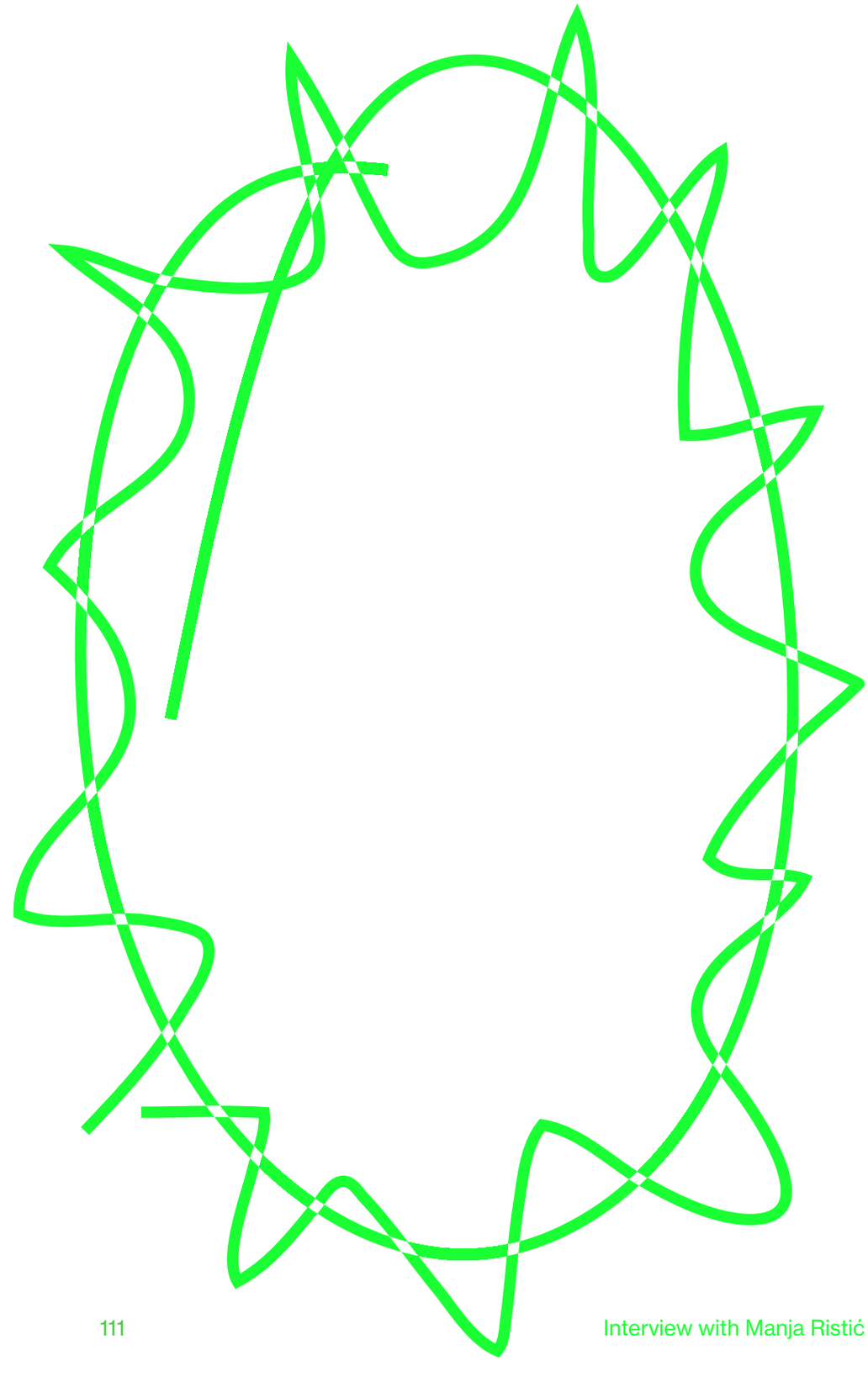
Also, my tolerance of dilettantism is seriously low these days. I am not saying that every musician needs to be a listening guru, but a certain level of professionalism simply demands that you develop an awareness of what certain sounds can do to people, animals, the environment...

Going to concerts is a completely different kettle of fish, especially in an entropic internet era where there is more and more content to consume literally by the day, without having to deal with post-pandemic social claustrophobia and without having to fight the beasts of post-digital culture. If someone is a musician and refuses to go to other people's concerts, there is an underlying reason for that. Whatever it is, we need to bring the culture of neurodivergence into the discourse about music, as well as camaraderie and solidarity. I enjoy listening to EVERYTHING, as well as NOTHING.

Extended mind-body listening is my favourite state of being.

At some point in your career, you embraced field recording and sonic ecologies. Which in a way is also about empathy with the world, curiosity and openness, a kind of observational modus operandi. What is your relationship to incorporating the environment into your work?

I think I walked into that field rather naïvely, but today, after a decade of active recording and sound art production, I am deeply grateful for the instincts that dragged me this way. On a deeply personal level, there must be a desire to expand and integrate experiences related to trans-human interconnectedness, a hunger for knowledge, creative curiosity, a deep love of nature, and an almost spiritually induced passion to get closer to nature's intelligence, which, in my opinion, includes musicality among its many unexpected qualities. Everything is in some way responsive to sound, from a living cell to an empty space. Dealing with environmental sound is complex, involves many aspects of research, and I am not particularly scientifically equipped, but still, I think



I have a pretty good antenna. The need to connect and share whatever one aspires to communicate is an intrinsic human need. This is how mine unfolds.

You are half-based on the island of Korčula in the Adriatic, a beautiful, idyllic area, which in the summer attracts many tourists. What is your relationship to this particular location, its genius loci?

I have been a full-time islander since June 2020. Before that, from 2013 onwards, I would spend half the year here and half in Belgrade. So the transition wasn't too hard. I also grew up here, my mother was born here, and my ancestors have had quite an incredible impact on the island community. It is a very powerful place in so many ways, historically dense, from the Neolithic period strategically important for the early development of Europe, with stunning nature in the heart of the Adriatic biome. It is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for soundscape research and interdisciplinary sound practice. Unfortunately, like many tourist destinations, it has been taken over by the political idiocy of corrupt mechanisms and greed, and has already been deeply damaged by mass tourism.

Living on the island used to be a real hardship. But nowadays it has many advantages. In a way, the pandemic forced me into the decision to move here permanently because my son was about to start school and we needed more control over his immediate environment and less stress for me in dealing with the challenges of autism.

I feel safe here, and I see it as home. And the school is great!

Being an artist and functioning as an artist in society is not an easy task. Artists are expected to entertain, but also to make statements and voice their opinions about all sorts of issues, be it politics or ecology, while surviving in precarious conditions, without the security of a job or a pension. The life of an artist is also something of a societal anomaly - artists have always functioned differently from the rest of the society. Then again, society forces everyone to conform to its rules and regulations. There is a kind of schizophrenia between this creative, maverick existence and the conditioning of society. What is your life as an artist like?

Precarious. Since early childhood. Very isolated at times, and with quite limited resources. On occasion deeply fulfilling, almost to the level of a spiritual micro-enlightenment. Mostly underpaid, but entirely independent. I still get hustled here and there by mediocre publishers who think that being an Eastern European means you would sell your soul for a bag of potatoes. No firm structures or fancy galleries to back me up, no security or continuous funding. No serious accolades. But also, my art has brought me collaborations with some of the greatest musical minds on the planet. I have made friends all over the world, and today I am very content to be a tiny part of an incredible creative network that involves contemporary artists, musicians, sound artists, curators, producers, actors, theatre and movie directors, poets, philosophers, theoreticians, scientists, researchers, scholars, educators, media workers, activists...

Looking from the outside, I lost my childhood in the whirlwinds of war, I lost my mother, I lost the opportunity to develop my first career as a classical violinist, and I lost many battles working in the arts and culture in the corrupting turmoil of a society in permanent transition.

My cultural identity developed in a country that no longer exists. I live on a rock in the middle of the sea. But I consider myself lucky. Because the density of all these life struggles and experiences brought me a genuine level of awareness and deep knowledge of the world. It has deepened my compassion and understanding of life, and it has expanded - and is still expanding - my consciousness. After all, our level of consciousness is all we have/leave behind. As we know, all matter dissolves.

During the last 20 years I have built up artistic, cultural and activist networks – all of which has rewarded me with a particular integrity, and today, at the age of 45, I mostly manage to work on my own terms, I don't need to conform to any societal norms (except maybe to the island community, there's no messing around with those folks!)

I am a single mum of an autistic boy.

I am a real threat to the patriarchy.

Photo Helena Vilović
Originally published on December 17, 2023.

I always wanted music to seek out some form of truth about who I am

Interview with Nic Krog

As a music and sound artist, Nic Krog's signature is a distinct and volatile blend of bass-heavy club music juxtaposed with subversive sound art and spoken word. Their artistic trajectory is characterised by a diaristic approach that recounts mental processes and psychological baggage from growing up as a queer outlier in a small town in Denmark. The work traces the metamorphosis of a colloquial introvert as they negotiate their place in the hedonistic capital of Berlin, Germany.

Your music is personal – it channels your feelings, moods, and memories from both past and present through a diaristic process of storytelling and composition. Could you talk about where and how you grew up, and how that background influences your artistic persona?

I grew up on an island called Falster in the south of Denmark. I was born in the countryside, but when my parents divorced, I started splitting my time between my father's farm and my mother's place, which was first in a small town, then a small city. By nature, I was this quite flamboyant queer kid who wanted to express myself, but in the small places where I was living, there just wasn't space for that. And this was reflected in my two homes as well – in one place I felt encouraged just to be myself and in the other, I was being taught to conform to expectations, and to be someone who didn't draw attention to themself. This experience had a lasting effect on me. For many years, I struggled to fit in – wanting, on some days, to fit in with a certain crowd and, on others, with a different group of people. But there was always a reluctance and hesitation because I felt I needed to reduce myself in order to fit in. Ultimately, having two upbringings, so to speak, based on two very different sets of values, taught me, both personally and as an artist, to question everything and to find my own way instead of adopting other people's values. In the end, it taught me to embrace fragmentation.

When it came to my music, I always wanted it to express my identity – I don't think I ever considered being impersonal as an option. I never had an interest in using different monikers for different things; I always wanted music to seek out some form of truth about who I am, but it took a certain maturity to understand that this meant that embracing fragmentation was necessary. That only happened shortly before my debut EP in 2016. Years earlier, in my early teens, I had gone through the process of trying to merge different identities through sound, but my interests were much narrower in scope at the time. Then, a few years later, my interests broadened like crazy, which meant that my ambitions did too. Aa a result, making music became too hard, there were too many obstacles to overcome, and I also felt that too much was at stake on a personal level. I had realised that I wanted to use my voice in my work, but I simply didn't have the confidence to do so. Feeling overwhelmed, I stopped making music for several years and gravitated towards other interests, including DJing. I felt conflicted about it, though. I had signed up for an A-level music class in high school because I knew I'd be forced to sing, but then I ended up dropping out of high school because I just couldn't deal with it emotionally. It took me many years and a lot of effort and help to get to a point where I felt comfortable using my voice in my music. People often describe my voice as deadpan, and ultimately, I think that's the consequence of having grown up in a place where I was taught – explicitly or implicitly – to tone it down.

Anyway, my teenage music-making, for the most part, saved me from depressive tendencies that had been present since childhood – tendencies that resurfaced in full force in my late teens and dominated my life throughout my twenties. Then, at some point, when I still hadn't properly returned to music, I realised that I was stuck emotionally – that therapy had gotten me so far, but only to a certain point, and seemingly no further. That's when I realised how therapeutic making music had been years earlier. So I decided to stop therapy and go back to music – properly this time – to try to stop getting sidetracked. For me, my work is therapeutic, which is why my personal experiences and the workings of my mind take up so much space in my work, in my lyrics. It's my way of reclaiming dark times, turning them into something positive. Retroactively, I have turned my depression into field work.

From relationships to mental states and deadlines, what themes do you incorporate into your work? Do they stem from writing that you do anyway (such as a diary), or are they inspired by your music work?

My diary writing is very on and off. Mostly off, although I've had periods where I spent more time writing about my life than living it. But my lyrics certainly do come from my personal life, though not always in real time. My latest release, *Perfect Pattern*, actually addresses a time that occurred before the subject of my 2021 album, although from a perspective that has developed over time, particularly due to the pandemic.

Lyrically, I think my work is largely driven by wanting to resolve challenges or examine questions I have, often of a psychological nature. I guess the same goes for my instrumentals; they typically emerge from experiments I was conducting during the same period as my writing. Coherence between music and

text is discovered and shaped as they develop together. Even my instrumental tracks originate from a narrative place, though there's rarely any idea of a narrative in there before I start making sounds. I'm just not much of a jam-session kind of person ...I'd like to be, but being in the moment isn't my strong suit.

Do you find it difficult to be personal and sometimes confessional in your lyrics?

Hmm. Well, first of all, I don't feel like I have a choice. But yeah, it does feel difficult, there is some fear there. But I find that whatever scares me, or anything that gives me a strong reaction, is usually worth paying some attention to, to understand why. There's usually a lot of re-writing involved in my writing process, though, which is somewhat focused on getting to a place of comfort... or some degree of comfort. But in that regard, *Perfect Pattern* was different from my other work because the relationship between text and music was inverted. *Perfect Pattern* is more about the text, and the music is largely a soundtrack to the text. So certain structures needed to be kept in. And because of that, this piece feels much rawer to me than anything else I've created. That's also why it's harder for me to listen to than my other work. But soon I'll be performing it in full, so that'll be an interesting, and surely intense, experience.

What is the interplay between the spoken word/vocal part and the musical element? Do you write the lyrics/ideas first, and then the music, or the other way around?

I don't have a particularly fixed process because I don't like feeling as though I'm repeating myself. But often, it begins either with text first or with a combination of text and a musical draft, and then both are shaped as I progress. I refine the text right up until the final recording session. *Perfect Pattern* was different, though; it was written in its entirety before I composed any music. The script for it also included descriptions of the music I would create. But then again, I don't really consider *Perfect Pattern* to be music as such – to me, it's a piece of writing first and foremost.

How do you find the performance aspect of your work – the personal spoken-word part that is performed in front of an audience, who might, of course, empathise with and relate to the situations you describe in your lyrics?

Mostly, the fear and shame I associate with my lyrics dissipate after performing them for an audience a few times. It's like when you open up a new subject with a therapist and it's the scariest thing in the world, but then you gradually strip it of its power, and you can begin to talk freely.

This year, you released a new album on Nick Klein's Psychic Liberation label, which was originally conceived for your Master's degree in Sound Studies and Sonic Arts at Berlin's Universität der Künste. How would you say it differs from your Opal Tapes debut, *Reproaching the Absurd*? It seems there is a bigger emphasis on the vocal part / spoken-word element in the new record...

I wouldn't actually refer to *Perfect Pattern* as an album – it's an audio play, which, to me, is something different from an album. In *Perfect Pattern* the text was finished by the time I began working on the music, the text really carries the whole thing, and the music is a soundtrack to it. *Reproaching the Absurd* was narrative-driven, too, but my voice and lyrics were more integrated into the larger musical whole.

Musically, in *Perfect Pattern* I wanted to keep things very simple, very skeletal, constantly referring back to the same elements. *Reproaching the Absurd* came out in 2021, but I had already started working on it in 2016 when my debut EP came out. On *Reproaching the Absurd,* I wanted to try my hand at everything – make it my own – everything except the genres that had dominated my EP.

What are your inspirations? Is literature something that inspires you?

Inspiration can come from anywhere for me. My emotional life. Memories or ideas of places, real or imagined. Everyday life is a big source of inspiration. Also, TV shows, mainly sitcoms and soap operas – I love how they dramatise mundane life. Movies, too. Musical tropes inspire me to some degree – maybe that's the musicologist in me. I like the idea of taking musical conventions and putting them into a completely different context. As I said, I also get a lot of creative energy from challenges. I'm very driven by the need to try things out, to grow, and keep moving forward.

I often find inspiration in music, but it's never because I want my music to sound like someone else's – in fact, I often get inspired by music I don't like, just because parts of it interest me. When I do draw inspiration from artists I look up to, it's usually because the tools they use add something performance-wise that I wish I could apply to my own work. If their tools add an immediacy to their performances, then the trick is to reinterpret that within the framework of my practice, which consists mostly of highly personalised tools.

When I wrote *Perfect Pattern*, I was really into films – that's how I ended up 'covering' a scene from *Contempt*. It was only after that that I got into reading; before then, I hadn't read much. But I see some similarities between that work and certain authors I've discovered since – like Hervé Guibert, for instance, whose books I love now. Admittedly, I only very recently read the book that *Contempt* is based on, by Alberto Moravia. But it's interesting just how deeply that book resonated with me and the experience that *Perfect Pattern* conveys. I was surprised by that in a way, because – to be honest – I didn't include the Godard scene because the film itself aligned with what I wanted to say. When I wrote *Perfect Pattern*, I had actually forgotten about the movie, but a friend of mine was talking about the specific scene, out of context, and it struck me that it pretty accurately portrayed an experience that I wanted to evoke in the audio play. Having rewatched the movie recently, I do see a parallel to the audio play, but not as much as there is between the audio play and Moravia's novel.

One book that has influenced my thinking in recent years is Jack Halbertstam's *The Queer Art of Failure,* especially in regard to my next release.

What awaits you next?

I've got a new EP coming out very soon, which I see as the true follow-up to *Reproaching the Absurd*. I think it narrows the scope of *Reproaching...*, even though the mood and attitude are different – more outgoing. I'll be releasing that myself.

Over the last year, I've been very focused on playing live, and I plan to keep that up. Among my upcoming live shows are a few special projects, including the first-ever live performance of *Perfect Pattern.* I also have a show coming up with Jeremy Coubrough, who plays saxophone on some of my tracks. Jeremy and I did an improv set once, but this will be the first time we perform my songs together live. It's a one-off show for now, but I'm hoping to do more, for sure. Another thing I've been focused on is programming tools that allow me to work in a more freeform, improvised way. That will be my focus during a collaborative project I've got coming up in Latvia for Skaņu Mežs, MABOCA, and SHAPE+, where I'll be collaborating on two performances with Latvian artists Andrejs Zālītis and Kristians Brekte.

Both my next EP and *Perfect Pattern* have been in the making for a very long time, so I'm craving some time to immerse myself in making new work. But of course, time is a luxury.

Photo Oda Egjar Starheim
Originally published on May 11, 2025.

Creating another reality

Interview with Sabiwa

Sabiwa is an experimental audiovisual performer. In her compositions, she manipulates and fragments the source material to the point of it becoming unrecognisable, leading to mesmerising and transcendental new dimensions of sound. Inspired by ancient music that imitates nature, she incorporates her own voice, drawing from the musical traditions of the native tribes of Taiwan, resulting in a remarkable psychedelic narrative. She collaborates with numerous forward-thinking artists and musicians. Her live performances encompass various formats, including live A/V shows with single or multi-projections, installations, and body performances.

How have you been and what have you been up to?

Busy and happy as always.

I just did a super fun residency programme in Latvia with Skaņu Mežs and the Maboca festival. I was hugely inspired by the freedom, people, nature and team partners (Sarma Gabrēna and Andrejs Zālītis) as well as working on the idea of connecting memory and sound and just the idea of pure having fun, of being present and only being in the moment. I also created some spontaneous mosquito and mosquito bites score compositions and a baby frog score.

All the compositions were composed out of the experience of living there and were performed for that moment, and those spontaneous, one-off shows made me feel extremely precious and now it has become the new direction I want to develop.

You mentioned that you started making music relatively late – around 10 years ago. Before that, you'd primarily been a visual artist, and making music was at first more about creating sound for your videos. Can you recollect this journey to producing music? And when did that moment come?

Until now, my work still pretty much works in this way; music always comes with the visual. At the moment, I'm still studying film at university, so my main approach to sound is still based on footage and some kind of abstract narrative story.

What role do memory and the concept of time play in your work?

They're super important at the moment. I often change my interests, but this is what I'm currently interested in and all the projects I'm working on at the moment are based on the concepts of time and memory. I was inspired a lot by funeral ceremonies and how people move from a 3D body to a pure 2D and digital identity after death. I have also been inspired by life in Taiwan. I've been away from my home for more than 10 years, but every year I go back and everything remains the same. And for me, the life of my entire family there is basically a loop from Monday to Sunday. When I look at the diary I wrote 20 years ago, time becomes a spiral, and I also feel that if I filmed each family member from Monday to Sunday, I would basically have filmed their entire life. So at the moment, I'm still developing this concept in a lot of different projects and exploring what it is.

You released a conceptual album called *Island no. 16 – Memories of Future Landscapes* in 2023. On this album, you recontextualise traditional Taiwanese folk music. Can you talk about this record and what it means to you?

For me, this album is more like an intro to all my shows from January to May. I used it to collect what I felt was valuable and wanted to keep, and I was also reflected in all these memories and played with writing and script writing. So as of January, all the shows are based on this album, but I also use a lot of other recordings I collected that are not on the album. I want to use all of these different kinds of material, and time and space to convey the idea about time and memory, and on the other hand, there are also many hidden messages in the recordings, some of which only appear in the live shows in cooperation with the script I wrote. It's about criticising the social system and colonisation through the jokes of the people in the countryside who are defined as subalterns. There are also sounds of the streets during the presidential election period in Taiwan.

How did you approach the production of this album, which incorporates a plethora of sonic material – including field recordings, samples, etc.

Originally it wasn't meant to be an album, just my personal collection of recordings and writings for the future world from past diaries. And I've edited it like a sound diary from time to time in the past few years. But it's been a process that's taken many years of collecting and editing according to the mood of the moment, so I also really don't know how to describe it, it was just organically shaped.

Is it difficult to work with one's own country's sonic traditions and heritage?

Yes, definitely.

It's difficult in terms of understanding the exact background story of the sonic heritage, especially for someone like me who was born at the end of the so-called period of "traditional" existence. The challenge is how to catch the last part of the 'local' before it is all Westernised and becomes universal through systemic and educational change. For example, the soundscape has changed so much.

All the traditional music is related to certain events (like planting the rice fields or harvesting), and now we no longer see herds of cows on the street going to work in the rice fields and farmers singing to kill the time as they do their intensive work. Instead, the sound of the machine has taken over the entire sound in my town, and those traditional sounds disappeared before sound recorders became easily accessible or people realised the value of preserving 'tradition' and the soundscape. It's the same with colonisation, for instance, in the music of the Indigenous tribes of Taiwan or many other places in Asia, Jesus appears many times in the lyrics instead of their own gods because of the missionaries. And the traditional tunes they sing are influenced by hymns. Anyway, there are always questions and challenges in exploring the background and defining my own relationship with tradition.

At the Prague SHAPE+ artist meetup, you mentioned several of your projects, and one of them is research and a project concerning deaf people. Can you talk about this project and what it taught you about sound, silence and perception?

This brilliant project was founded by Berlin-based artists Rob Blake and Emin Aksoy.

It totally opens up a new perspective on thinking about sound and memory. It also reminds me of when I was at elementary school in Taiwan. We had this class in which we had to experience some kind of inconvenience. And every week we had a different topic, for example, we covered our eyes to experience blindness, or sat in wheelchairs, or tied a basketball on our bellies all day to experience pregnancy. Now that I'm grown up, I realise that this is something I forgot for a long time but now it's really inspiring me a lot!

For example, I've recently been writing a new script about the concept of imaginary sound and also a visual project that combines an installation with a live performance. I would like to collaborate with other performers and artists on it. The installation part will be videos of everyday occurrences, things like something falling on the floor, a flower opening, etc. And there will be a re-making of the sounds and a text about an imaginary visual from the re-created sound (written by both the viewer and the performer). Then the performers and I will build up a strange landscape and soundscape based on the text from the remade sound and the installation, and make it into a stage play, including dialogue about this theme. So there will be a kind of snowball effect, rolling far away from reality but creating another new reality.

Photo @sufu.life
Originally published on June 7, 2024.

The music I make doesn't exist in a vacuum

Interview with
Adela Mede

Adela Mede is a Slovak-Hungarian musician and singer whose works weave together elements of Central European folklore, contemporary vocal techniques, minimalistic compositional structures and experimental electronics. Her intimate, powerful songs, sung in three languages – Hungarian, Slovak and English – explore the reality of a life stretched across borders. The voice is central to her practice; it's dominant, centre-stage, the expression of a universal language that Mede uses to describe a reality beyond our individual experience. She studied popular music at Goldsmiths, University of London, and is now based in Bratislava, Slovakia. Her latest release, Ne Lépj a Virágra, was released in November 2023 by Warm Winters Ltd. and Mappa.

When we were arranging this interview, we actually discussed the languages in which we would speak. Language is also a system of thought, and sometimes you change as a person when you speak in a different language.

What does language mean to you?

It obviously makes life so much easier when you adopt the language that the locals speak. And I don't just mean that you learn it at school and then you speak it. When I went to London and worked in a cafe, I adopted a completely different language, a completely different intonation that I hadn't known existed.

So for me, it's a tool for fitting in, but at the same time, it's also something that I've used to connect with my parents and to connect with some sort of roots that I have somewhere, to understand what that means to me. And to understand what home means to me.

And is home for you something geographical – in terms of country or region – or is it more personal – in terms of your family and your upbringing?

It's definitely geographical as well, because when I visited Poland, I felt really great there, even though I wouldn't say that speaking Slovak in Poland in any way contributed to that. But I could imagine living there and not feeling out of place.

I went to an international school and thought that I would get along with anyone who spoke English, and then I moved to London, and I had a culture shock. I felt really out of place, and it was as if I'd been reminded that I was Eastern European.

I was very shocked and realised that I actually didn't have any idea who I was. I was brought up in the British system, which doesn't necessarily erase, but certainly doesn't focus on the historical context of Eastern Europe. So it was very easy to think that it wasn't important where I came from or what the history of Slovakia was; I should just look to the West, and that would give me all the answers.

I'm not complaining because it's a very privileged position to be in – to go to an international private school in Slovakia, speaking and learning in English. It's the main reason my parents put me in the school – because they wanted me to have a more open world than they had.

But I think they had regrets because I became someone they didn't recognise anymore. I just fully immersed myself in it without realising that there's so much more nuance in life than the sort of globalised world we're trying to create where everyone is unified. But it's not like that in reality.

So I felt lied to a little bit.

But it's also interesting that your lyrics and your track and album titles are also in languages like Slovak and Hungarian, which maybe Westerners don't understand. And in spite of – or maybe because of that – your music has perhaps resonated even more than that of many of the musicians from our country who sing in English (the author of this article is also from Slovakia – note).

This has been very interesting to me because, to be honest, I didn't really care. I felt so strongly that I needed to sing in these languages and to specifically rhyme in Slovak and Hungarian that I didn't really think so much about how it would be received. I was very surprised by the way in which it was actually received.

Maybe I'm also riding this trend or wave of exploring the folkloric roots of Eastern Europe, and I'm aware that this might have helped a little. But, for

example, when I started playing in Slovakia, one of my first concerts was in [a town in eastern Slovakia] Prešov, and I heard people in the audience saying, “Why is she singing in Hungarian again?”, and they would leave.

It’s funny because Prešov is only an hour and a half away from Košice, which is full of Hungarians. But that doesn’t really happen anymore. People know what they’re coming for when they come to my concerts, and I’m grateful for that. I used to be a bit scared, wondering, “Okay, what’s going to happen? Am I going to be in an emotional state?” You’re kind of overcoming yourself – your shyness, your imposter syndrome. Should I keep going? Is it too much?

Yeah, it’s interesting because you come from the border area of Slovakia and Hungary, which has always been bilingual. Were you surprised by some of the reactions to your music?

Yeah, very surprised because I guess I made this decision to study popular music at university. So that was the commitment I needed to follow through and I needed to really try to make it work.

When I released my first album – it was during Covid, lockdown-ish times, and everything was still a bit uncertain – it was extremely encouraging that *Szabadság* was so well received. But that was also thanks to the community that was built around Adam, my husband, and his label [Warm Winters] and also friends that we made in London.

It was a huge confirmation for me that I could actually make this work. I really struggled with playing live. It was much harder than putting out music, of course, because it feels so vulnerable, especially the songs that are in Hungarian and about my parents.

I remember I was opening for Claire Rousay in Copenhagen, and I’m scared of flying. I had to hold the hand of the lady next to me on the flight there, and then after my gig I broke down crying and told Claire that I didn’t think this was for me, that I was just going to be a teacher for the rest of my life. That it would be more fulfilling, I could be with children. And Claire was so sweet. She told me, “Of course you can, whatever makes you happy. You were great out there, but if you feel like this isn’t for you, that’s okay”.

Then I came home, I recovered, and a few months later I booked some gigs over the summer, and started to see the joy of it and started to understand that this was probably the best way to make money from my music as well.

Is your music now your main profession?

Yeah, let’s say so. I’ve always considered teaching as part of my creative process because I’m very inspired by voices that are not professional. It’s like hearing an album that I’ve never heard before – it really sticks with me.

Especially when there’s a collective like the women I’m teaching now. I feel like I should be paying them, not the other way around. One of these students even ended up on my second album. This is something I always want to keep open to because there’s so much beauty I see in it.

When you were studying at Goldsmiths, University of London, was that more of a theoretical or a practical course?

It’s actually really well balanced. There’s a lot of theoretical academic essays on aesthetics. I remember one of the best essays I wrote was an analysis of Kara-Lis Coverdale’s music.

I could academically explore all the things that interested me in-depth. We also had to produce recorded music and an essay as well as a live performance of the music. So, we were always taught to think deeply about things, produce them well, and also consider how to put them in a live setting.

I really enjoyed studying at Goldsmiths. It gave me so much. It was absolutely the best money I’ve ever spent in my life. But unfortunately, there were a lot of strikes, and all of the lecturers who taught me and gave me so much have left.

Why were the strikes happening?

Because of cuts to their pension schemes. It was just getting worse and worse for the teachers; they were working themselves too hard. I guess it’s like it is at any other university.

Has the course given you some sort of self-reflection on what you do because you were analysing other musicians?

Yeah, it really influenced me and helped me to understand that the music I make doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It can have a purpose. It can be a research project. But this was also the kind of school of thought that I was immersed in. So, I don’t know if things would have been different had I not gone to Goldsmiths. But I really appreciate the idea that an album or a performative project can be a research project and it can contribute to something meaningful.

Goldsmiths really helped me to see the impact that music has – understanding pop culture, developing your taste and seeing how you fit into that. And learning what cultural appropriation is, what imitation is, and exploring these more political issues within the popular and experimental music scene that are important to discuss.

Then there is also inspiration, I guess. What was yours?

I hadn't listened to any Björk before I went to Goldsmiths. I didn't know her. The first time I heard her song "Jóga" I was like, whoa, how did I miss this? Also, most of my classmates were from London or elsewhere in the UK and not from private school backgrounds like me. That was so refreshing because everyone had such good taste, and I learned so much. There was a big group of us who would go for lunch, and it would turn into a big soup club where we would continue discussing some of the lectures.

That was invaluable because you're contributing to a discourse and trying to understand and learn together.

A community. Do you have such a community now in Bratislava as well?

It took some time to find it. We got a dog to help us make friends. There isn't the same openness in Slovakia as there is in London, and we were kind of grieving that when we came back. How were we going to make friends? How were we going to meet our neighbours? How could we approach people without it seeming weird?

So that's why we got a dog, and it worked. But it also helped when I started playing concerts and realised that I really enjoy gigs because I get to meet new people. I see how people go above and beyond everything to organise festivals and concerts and how they are so passionate about music. I guess that's what my second album is all about.

Are you working on new music?

It's in its very early stages, but I already have some collaborators. One of them is with a Hungarian artist who moved to Slovakia. She's learning Slovak, and we became friends because we were booked for a gig together in [south Slovak town] Dunajská Streda.

She writes amazing poetry and she also took me to hear a Slovak-Hungarian choir. I had a bit of a culture shock because they were singing the Hungarian anthem, and they had their eyes closed, and I was like, where am I? It was a bit scary and it was a bit hard on my voice. But we had this experience together and we talked about it, and I want to write lyrics with her specifically. On this album, I'm exploring the clash I have in my head because now I've ended the honeymoon phase of being back in Slovakia.

Now I'm starting to notice my neighbourhood more. I'm trying to learn how to keep loving everyone, regardless of some of their thoughts, and to realise that maybe they're just listening to propaganda...A lot of people I've become friends with and really appreciate move away from here. How to accept that and have the love for those people, too, because they're also acting out of love.

I guess this is what I'm exploring on the new album.

Are you also involved in the Warm Winters Ltd label that your husband Adam has?

People ask me this all the time. I am in no way involved, to the point where if Adam needs help with packing, I'm like, I can't iron clothes, and I cannot pack things, so please don't make me do it.

I just hear the demos when he listens to them, and that's a blessing, but I have no say.

Sonically, you mentioned you might record some elements of the new album at your grandparents'.

So far, I only have lyrics and the people I want to work with, but my biggest dream is to work with a choir. I'm not sure if this is the time that it will happen, but I'm learning how to work with a choir now that I'm teaching one. Before I go to teach them, I have this little voice in my head telling me that I'm not qualified to do it. But they're very patient with me, and we have a great time together. I would really like to explore collective singing more, and what it brings up, what it evokes. And not even in a folkloric way, because while that's obviously where it's rooted and where its beauty comes from, I don't want to appropriate it, even though it might be my own culture. I don't want to end up doing covers. I try to be very sensitive, taking elements that are more abstract and universal rather than repurposing something. There are so many people who are deeply committed to and live the culture much more fully, whereas I would just be an outsider trying to replicate it.

Photo Kvet Nguyen
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I always go down online rabbit holes

Interview with alys(alys)alys

Brazil-born and Berlin-based, alys(alys)alys explores the (un)common ground between experimental, club, and SoundCloud music, crafting a dynamic approach to her own productions and eclectic DJ sets. Since 2018, she has performed at venues and parties such as Berlin Atonal, CTM Festival, Venice Biennale, Herrensauna, and some of the notorious Brazilian parties such as Mamba Negra. alys is also a resident of DRY, a Berlin-based music collective aimed at connecting queer, ethnically diverse, and boundary-pushing individuals. In the meantime, she has been working as the producer for singer-songwriter Monstera Black. In 2023, she released the second volume of her genre-blurring compilation, booty & legs, featuring club-ready music that sits at the intersection of experimental club sounds and pop.

Thanks for agreeing to this interview. It was a bit of a last-minute request.

No, it's all good. Thanks for having me. I'm actually free of work today.

What do you do?

I work part-time in the office of the HHV record store. It's mainly just cataloguing the releases. It's kind of a broad catalogue, not just electronic.

How long have you been in Berlin?

It will be eight years this year, though I'm planning to move to Barcelona soon, somewhere more sunny. I just got tired of the winters in Berlin, and also the political situation. I feel it's getting more and more tense. So yeah, maybe next year I'll go back to Brazil for a bit and then I'll decide.

Are you still connected with Brazil and its music scene?

I was doing events there from when I was 18 as part of a collective called Sweetuf Records. I got to meet a lot of people because although Brazil is big, the music scene is pretty well-connected. I also have a collective here in Berlin called DRY and we book a lot of the DJ's and producers from Brazil when they're on their summer tours.

Where in Brazil are you from?

I'm from Curitiba, which is a one-hour flight from São Paulo, six hours drive. I used to do events in Curitiba and also sometimes in Sao Paulo. The scene there is way bigger and a bit more interesting. But I never lived there. Then I moved to Italy, then Berlin.

Where did you start making music?

I'd been doing events and DJing a bit, and when I moved to Europe, I didn't know what to study, because I was 18, 19, and my parents were kind of pushing me to do a bachelor's degree. So I did one in Berlin in music production and sound engineering.

Your music is really complex in that you can hear that you listen to a lot of very diverse music and absorb it without replicating it; all the influences are synthesised in a very unique way.

My grandfather played jazz and my grandmother played piano, but I never met them, because they died before I was born. My dad used to listen to a lot of stuff like Shania Twain and bought DVDs of big concerts. So I grew up with Cher and Madonna. My mom listened to rock bands like Pearl Jam, Creed, Audioslave and Pink Floyd.

And because of that, I started playing drums when I was 12; I got a small drum kit.

My parents were always kind of like, "If you want to do it, that's fine, it's a hobby". I played drums for two years, but I got a bit bored with it. Later on, I picked up a guitar, and then I started DJing at 16, but I was always listening to everything, from indie to rock to electronic to early dubstep. And I was online a lot. I got a computer pretty early, when I was 12 or 13. So from then on, I was always with earphones and an iPod, researching music. Then a friend lent me some decks for a bit when I was 15 or 16, and I got super addicted to them. So for two years, I was learning to DJ for two to three hours a day after school. Everything was some kind of novelty for me, whether it was techno or tech house, whatever was going on.

When I moved to Europe, I downloaded Ableton, and I started playing around with that. But what I was producing was mainly techno or house, four-to-the-floor stuff, but always with a kind of collage approach. I would use a lot of samples and play around with them. I never managed to properly learn music theory. The friends who knew music theory would sometimes question why I used certain sounds. But I just liked them, I didn't like to over-analyse.

During Covid, I got back into listening to pop, and that brought new influences into what I do. I felt that I had been hyper-focused on club sounds for a few years, and when I stepped away from that, I realised that there were so many things I'd missed out on. I have too many interests. I never approach making music with the intention of creating a club track or an experimental one specifically. Nowadays, I'm working with a vocalist called Monstera Black, and that has also helped me to move beyond just club and functional music, allowing me to open up. Now I'm trying to focus more on the technical aspects of production.

Because you also produce for other people, right?

I produce with friends, which is more of a collaboration. With Chantal, for example, we would sometimes go to the studio together. She would send me a draft of her idea, and I'd expand on it, leading to a bit of back and forth between us. That's what I'm most excited about at the moment because I feel like I'm listening to a lot of pop and trap nowadays, and I'm more comfortable doing that right now. I'm mainly DJing other people's music, or some of the edits I've started doing, but there's an interesting contrast there because sometimes I find it hard to just sit down and listen to club music. It's become quite challenging for me to find tracks that I want to play, so I end up doing a lot of research.

You also do this bootleg series.

Two more releases in that series are ready now. I've just figured out the artwork because I work with a friend of mine, Rafael Messias from Brazil, who's now living here. We're just trying to merge that visually, because I'm more interested in pictures than just graphic design alone.

I never had a proper CDJ setup at my house, so I always have this four-track MIDI controller, and I use Traktor a lot. When I started mixing, I would always mix with four channels, but it's hard to do that with four CDJs in a club. So I started to be interested in combining four tracks played together and queuing them. But I didn't know how to replicate this in a club context, so I decided just to record it and then play it in the club. And that opened up a lot of ideas.

My friend Rafa has an insane knowledge of pop culture from the 2000s, so he's always like, "Oh my God, listen to this old Victoria Beckham EP". So it's about getting old mixtapes from pop artists and throwing that on the club stuff that

I like to play, because I find that they kind of coexist in the same space. I think the attitude toward commercial pop has changed, and pop has some of the most interesting productions; they have the budget to bring in a lot of underground artists or people I would never have imagined, like Total Freedom or Arca.

Do you see yourself going in that direction, or would you want to stay more in the underground?

I like the underground. I like DJing. I don't think it's something I would ever stop doing. It's really great to DJ in Brazil. I feel more fun and comfortable there because it's not like the club scene in Europe, it's more underground and DIY. Here in Europe, it's the same everywhere you go – there's a club with a manager, everything is fixed.

But at the same time, I'm getting more and more curious about production and being in the studio. So I see myself maybe co-producing for more people, and I also like remixing a lot or even watching catwalks and fashion ads, which is something I could see myself getting more into. I'm curious about different genres or ways of dealing with sound that I could expand on. I'm just learning how to do this because I think in Berlin, you kind of end up in a bubble. I'm 26 at the moment, so I'm still trying to understand how a lot of things work and how to get into spaces other than just clubs.

You are also a part of the DRY collective in Berlin.

Everyone is from different backgrounds – Italians, Germans, Venezuelans, Brazilians – and we have a similar taste in music. It's diverse. We started curating lineups that we didn't normally see at the parties here. I feel that Berlin has either house parties, straight techno ones, and then more bass and fast jungle stuff, but more experimental or eclectic DJs such as Ziúr, DJ Marcelle and Cassius Select are lacking. We're trying to bring DJs that we want to see, which can be tricky because sometimes they don't bring in money for the club, but it's okay. It's a bit of a risk.

Do you also feel connected to some sort of global scene?

I think that since Covid, I don't go out as much as I used to. And I've realised that, especially with DJing, it's about showing your face and talking with people. So I sometimes feel more connected online with what's going on than in the local Berlin scene. In Berlin, people are really separated into their own niches, which is something that doesn't happen in Brazil. Everyone is connected there, because economically it makes sense; everyone needs to help each other out. Every time I go back, I feel like I'm more connected with people. Musically, I think that by listening to a lot of things online, I can keep track of a lot of different scenes at the same time, which is interesting but sometimes overwhelming.

It seems that with Covid, a whole generation stopped going out, and it continued after the end of the pandemic.

For me, it was more that before I had more energy to go out, to release energy, and to meet people. But during Covid, my friendships and relationships got stronger. We hang out in someone's house and play video games. It can be very intense to go out in Berlin, taking drugs and not sleeping, but mainly just the energy you give out. I think sometimes it's heavier than I realised. After Covid, the first time I went out, I was like, "Oh, my God, I'm so drained", even though I got home at 3am, you know. So I had to think about how much energy I was willing to give to this. But everyone has their own reasons. It's also gotten more expensive in the past two years, so I think people are more selective about when they go out.

And in terms of music, how do you search for new music to listen to? What are your sources?

Nowadays I try to explore the discographies of artists, so I've been listening to a lot of old M.I.A. records and George Michael's discography – it's really random. I've been collecting music for a long time, so sometimes I just put stuff on shuffle, and when something sparks my interest, I'm like, "Okay, let me check out the labels or connected artists". With more pop, trap, or rock stuff, I go for the same labels, or discover releases on Instagram. For club music, I mainly use SoundCloud. I always go down online rabbit holes, with lots of tabs open, jumping from one playlist to the other, and then there's also Bandcamp.

I tried to get into vinyl some years ago, and collect it, but that only lasted about a year until I'd had enough. It's expensive, and most of the music I like is not pressed on vinyl anyway.

The internet is a really interesting place to research music. People sometimes say that there aren't so many great releases or that everything sounds the same, but I really don't agree. It's just a matter of researching and knowing where to look. There are some blogs like Wandcamp, Great Tunes or Boomkat where you can find stuff or people's playlists, including from artists that you like, even on Spotify. I also check NTS tracklists. I listen to music whenever I'm alone and always have earphones with me, so it's kind of like having a randomised playlist all the time. I'm always curious and have a constantly growing list of albums that I need to check out.

Besides music, do you have any other hobbies or interests that you have been really into lately?

I used to draw a lot, but not so much now. I probably drew more than I did music when I was younger. Taking pictures of buildings and copying them on paper. I also started making collages during Covid, picking up magazines, cutting them up and gluing them together. I also like to watch movies and go to galleries; I pretty much always need to be visually stimulated. But I also like to be outdoors a lot, which is why I'm planning to move from Berlin, because in the winter you're kind of locked inside, and I always need to go for at least a 40-minute walk, otherwise I think I'd go crazy.

Are you thinking I'm going back to Brazil?

I don't think I could go back to living there because I'd need to move to Sao Paulo, which is where things happen musically and creatively, and I couldn't live there. It's too intense. I like that Berlin has a laid-back vibe, you can still, for now at least, have a part-time job without having to hustle all the time. Brazil is not doing so well at the moment, including economically. Unfortunately, there's no funding for the arts there. The government really doesn't see the value of underground cultures. It's harder and more expensive for people to put on events. I see a lot of friends from Brazil who are really good artists, but they're always struggling. Everything's got more expensive.

I guess Western Europe is this lone island with public funding and some sort of social security, but the rest of the world is not like this.

My friends from Latin America come to Europe in the summer to tour. They play three gigs in one weekend because this is where the money and opportunities are. If you don't do that, you're not really recognised on the global music scene, which is still – come on, it's 2024 – concentrated here in Europe. I don't know how this could be changed, but we all need validation from Europe to be someone.

I feel that a lot of Latin American artists need to be tough with European promoters, even regarding fees, because they always think they're doing us a favour in some sense. Even though Latin sounds are growing and everyone's copying them, they don't ever think, "Oh, let's bring over the artists we're copying from".

But something I see a lot of my friends doing is having business conversations with Europeans, and when they have the chance, they speak up about it, just to raise a bit of awareness.

I sample a lot, and I work with different sounds. But at least when I'm doing it, I try to get a bit of the context of what I'm sampling. Sometimes people sample a funk acapella with extremely sexist lyrics, etc, but they don't even check what the words mean.

Photo Rafael Costa Messias
Originally published on August 25, 2024.

Creating your own futurism

Interview with Nikolaienko

Nikolaienko is a Ukrainian sound artist. Dmytro Nikolaienko works mainly with outdated music gear, which he uses to produce tape and cassette loops as base material for his sound collages, such as his album Rings (2021), released on Jan Jelinek's Faitiche label. He has also released and appeared on such labels as 12th Isle, Graphical, Porridge Bullet, Kvitnu, Nexsound, Muscut and others. Dmytro is also the founder of Muscut (est. 2012, Kyiv) – a label that focuses on modern avant-garde Eastern European artists, and a co-founder of Shukai – an archival label focused on bringing back to life the lost tapes of underrated artists who were persecuted by the censorship of the Soviet period.

How and where are you at the moment?

I never wanted to, but apparently I live a nomadic life. Currently, I'm in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. I moved here around three months ago from Tallinn, Estonia, where I lived for around four years. Originally I'm from Dnipro, but before moving to Tallinn, I lived in Kyiv, Ukraine for eight years.

You work with a lot of historical equipment – effects, reel-to-reels, tape players. What is it about this old equipment that attracts you?

Yes, it looks better and it smells better, but my approach and method are more pragmatic and environmentally conscious than nostalgic. Here is what I mean. I believe that every instrument remains an instrument, there is no expiration date. For me, a tape (reel or cassette) is an instrument, like a guitar – I don't think you can say that a guitar is an outdated instrument. I reuse and recycle (and also service and maintain) 'outdated' audio gear, equipment, and media, so I extend their life and try to expand their technical possibilities as instruments. I believe that there will always be new ideas to put into the old gear, making it impossible for that gear to become obsolete. I believe that the past doesn't disappear or dissolve. All eras live simultaneously at the same time. Everyone has the freedom to choose which era they live in, they can surround themselves with the artefacts of their favourite era and isolate themselves in their bubble and not know what's happening in the mainstream (like I do, or like some of my friends who don't have any social media do, for example). It's not about being stuck in time – it's about choosing your lifestyle and creating your own futurism.

Besides the technical aspects of making music with this media – there is also the aesthetic aspect – the sounds emanate wrapped in an echo, the ghosts in the machine; notions such as hauntology come to mind. But the sonics themselves are timeless, not referring to any particular era. They are rather liquid, almost subaquatic.

This question is so good, it describes my concept so precisely that I don't have anything to add. Except that the notion of my music being timeless is rare (thanks again, I think I will use it in my press release, if I may). I often hear that my music belongs to the 60s-80s era, which I cannot agree with. There is a paradox in that it actually was technically possible for someone to make my music back in the 1960s – 1980s or later (because I only use the gear that was available at that time). However, nobody did it back then (yes, artists were doing similar things, but not really that close) because there were other ideas, priorities, and requirements for the sound, e.g., musicians simply wanted to have sound that was clear rather than blurry and haunting, etc. If they (the musicians of that era) had digital files back then – only a few would have used tape – I know this, because I interviewed lots of artists from that era who we released on the archival label Shukai. Their eyes were sparkling when they talked about computers and how they wished they had had them when they were young, and how tape was a really shitty medium compared to a digital format and so on and so forth. But that's not the case with me, I actually need tape to make music the way I want it to be/sound.

Your 2022 release, *Nostalgia Por Mesozóica*, is inspired by tropical synthscapes, alluding to recording techniques and sound properties of the 60s and 70s. A fictional electro/tropicalia world is built, a complex aural world of its own, which perhaps alludes to the past more than your other releases. Can you talk about this album and the notion of building your specific sonic universes?

First there was an image – a picture that I took in Kyiv's Natural History Museum in 2013 (an artificial tropical landscape isolated behind a glass frame and fenced off by a handrail for more comfortable viewing), which haunted me afterwards, prompting me to do something with it. So it became the cover of the album before I did any of the sound. The title came later, around 2016. It was an irony about the mass culture obsession with nostalgia for the 60s – 90s, and my message was, why not

the Mesozoic Era? It is very common for people to experience nostalgia for times they never lived in, so why not an era when no humans were yet alive? (wiki: The earliest humans did not evolve until around 2 million years ago. This means that the earliest cavemen were 63 million years too late to experience the last days of the Mesozoic Era).

Sound-wise, I had the idea of making artificial/synthesised field recordings (to accompany the cover image of the artificial tropical landscape), pseudo-ethnographic recordings of the exotic flora and fauna with easy listening and Fourth World music motives. There is no single sample of real field recording material. The album (started in 2016 and released in 2022) was fully created on studio synths – every sound is synthesised, from bird sounds to percussion beats. Then processed and deconstructed with tape loops to add more blurriness and a richer sound palette.

Working with these specific technologies is probably much harder in live situations – controlling the equipment in the way that you need to in the moment, live in front of an audience. How are your live performances?

Yes, every live show is very different when you work with this type of gear. I have a plastic toolbox where I store my tape loops; they are all labelled, but I still often confuse them so I also surprise myself when I mix loops that I haven't mixed before – actually, that's what I like the most in the live performances, it's very close to studio work. When I work on the material and don't surprise myself, that's the worst. I only save (meaning I don't erase the tape loops) if they really surprise me, and then I store them in my toolbox.

Another thing about the performances in general is that I think I should play my live shows in universities and museums rather than in concert spaces and clubs. I came to this conclusion after playing a live show at the Unsound festival in 2022, which was in an abandoned university lecture amphitheatre space. As I played, I realised that I belonged to that place more than any other place I had played in before. What I do during my live show is almost like a museum showcase or a lecture – a museum employee/university professor demonstrating historical media and gear – I only lack the white gloves when I perform... Later that year, I also played at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague in front of audio faculty students with a similar feeling, which confirmed my thoughts.

Besides being a musician, you also run two labels: Muscut, which has released several noteworthy releases by Ukrainian and other artists. According to its Bandcamp page, the label is "focusing on pseudo and practical audio archaeology." Can you talk about Muscut?

Another label you run is Shukai, which focuses on archival releases, soundtracks etc. What importance does sonic archaeology have for you?

The two labels are different but try to be similar – one trying to release timeless music by contemporary artists, the other looking for timeless music lost in the archives. Philip Sherburne wrote recently in his review of one of the label's releases: "Muscut releases mostly new music, while its sublabel Shukai tends to concentrate on archival releases, but without looking at the logo stamped on the sleeve, you'd often be hard pressed to know which category a given release belongs to" – I found this formulation so good and accurate that I even put it into a press release, replacing the old description of "pseudo and real archaeology."

Apart from that, my intention in establishing the first (Muscut, est. 2012) label was to create a niche label with artists, primarily from Eastern Europe, who make similar music. So similar that you could be forgiven for thinking that it's a single artist making music under different aliases. Coincidentally, it's the 12th anniversary of the Muscut label this month.

And lastly, what are your current projects, both in terms of your solo work and your labels?

There are many plans; two solo albums will be released this year and next year, which is not typical for me as I usually have a three- or four-year break between such releases. This year's album is called *META* and will be released on cassette this autumn on Muscut. It's an album where I've limited myself to using only two instruments – a metallophone and a four-track tape recorder. Explorations of the metallophone and tape sounds, deconstructed and reintegrated into tracks with cassette loops. This release is part of this year's *Iseries*, which is dedicated not to electronic but to electro-acoustic music with a focus on analogue recording and production. Like the record released just last week – Hennadii Boichenko's 7" *Sea Songs,* for which I did the mixing and tape mastering. It was the first time in the label's history that we sent reel tape as a master to the vinyl pressing plant instead of the digital files we used to use.

As for the archival releases on Shukai, we have lost contact with many artists due to the Russian invasion. There were projects in progress, which are on hold at the moment. The artists are older people without email, for example, and we had been talking with them via mobile phone, but they are no longer responding. We think they might have left the country with their families and their phones are simply out of roaming.

Photo Jakub Knera (at Unsound), Malinski
Originally published on March 17, 2024.

Ale Hop on growing up under an authoritarian regime, church bells and Latin America's sonic practices

Interview with Ale Hop

Alejandra Cárdenas Pacheco (also known as Ale Hop) is a Peruvian-born artist, researcher, and experimental musician based in Berlin. Her body of work includes live shows, record releases, sound and video artworks, research on sound and technology, and original music for film, dance and theatre projects.

You began your career in the 2000s, in Lima's experimental and underground scene. Can you recollect this period and environment? How did you enter this scene, and how important was it for your future development?

The year 2000 was a meaningful year for me. Before that, at the end of the 90s, I was obsessed with music, but it was more focused on collecting, recording cassettes, buying CDs, tabs and scores, and so on. It was the last period of Alberto Fujimori's dictatorship, and I went to a middle-class high school where kids were mainly pro-Fujimori (because their parents were). He was demolishing every democratic institution left in the country, while on TV and radio, tecnocumbia music was the sensation of the time. Later, it became known that musicians, TV hosts and leading people in the media received dirty money from the dictator's regime.

But coming back to the year 2000, it was the first time I attended an underground 'rock' concert ('rock' because it brought together many genres), and it was the first time I saw three hundred angry people shouting against the government. My first thought was, "this is where I want to stand." I then lost interest in grunge, pop, or anything happening on MTV. For the next decade, I was involved in bands. I tried different styles, from punk to garage and pop, and finally landed in electronic and experimental music, which was a very small and marginal scene in the city then but has grown exponentially in the last decade. On the other hand, this underground 'rock' became more popular and depoliticised quickly and was monotonous and quite uninteresting. However, it was not the political aspect that attracted me in the first place; it was always more about the reality depicted in contrast with what the mass media was showing.

There was something about growing up in the 1990s – 2000s in Lima, an environment that was violent and repressive, that stays with you. I think, nowadays, my live show sometimes becomes an outburst of this mental state, which is like a trauma finding its way out. I realised some time ago that this happened naturally if I played my instrument from a position of vulnerability in relation to the audience. That is why I avoid postures or gestures that appear powerful when playing the electric guitar, which is my main instrument on stage. Even though I work in different formats (releases, video, installation, research), I would say that the live show is the centre of everything I do because it is the only practice in which I can experience this.

In Berlin, you direct a platform called Contingent Sound, which aims to facilitate critical thought, artistic research, and experimental formats relating to the practice of listening and relationality focusing on the global South. Can you talk about this platform and your role in it?

I put together a publication in 2020 under the title *Border-Listening/Escucha-Liminal*, which gathered texts from Latin American theoreticians working in the field of sound. The idea was to make it the companion of the discursive programme of the Radical Sounds Latin America festival, which I was co-curating back then, and it became a hybrid event that year because of the Covid crisis.

What I was really looking to do was to compile an entire book of Latin American positions on listening. Also, to find meeting points in their concepts and methodologies. For example, I knew that many of them were articulating categories of analysis related to the Latin American 'modernity/coloniality' group. And these are decolonial perspectives that are different from postcolonial studies. The latter has had a more significant influence on sound studies over the last years.

I edited a second edition in 2021, but then I left the festival team because it was too time-consuming. Thus, I founded the Contingent Sounds platform to continue with this editorial work. We now have three books in the making for next year that are very exciting.

You have been mapping the music scenes of Latin America, for instance, you made a beautiful mixtape focused on female pioneers of electronic and electroacoustic music. The focus has largely been on Western composers in this field, and awareness of non-Western early electroacoustic and experimental music remains minimal. Can you talk about your research in this field?

This also relates to one of the book projects we'll be releasing next year with Contingent Sounds; I can't say much about it before it is announced. However, I made this mixtape as I was diving into the subject, also for my personal artistic research. I thought it was a shame I didn't know about these fantastic composers until a few years ago.

Another project rooted in South America is your audiovisual installation *Why Is It They Say a City Like Any City?* It imagines a hallucinatory journey through South American territories, through sound and visual vignettes created in collaboration with thirteen musicians around the world. Can you talk about this project in particular?

Yes, this project was my 2020 Covid – lockdown baby. It began as an exercise of telepathy. I wanted to do a collaborative project with musicians I admire who live in different parts of the world, and I refused to use Zoom or any of those videoconference technologies. I was doing this exercise back then: writing postcard-like messages or letters from places I wanted to go to. They were all located in South America. I used several sources to write them: memories, history books, and weird YouTube videos of people walking through the streets of those cities. I found them fascinating (now, you can find these YouTube videos of people walking in almost every city in the world). It occurred to me that instead of sending an instrument line to the musicians I wanted to collaborate with, I could use these letters, and send them a 'place' and ask for responses in the form of sounds. So, I had six cities and thirteen musicians.

I then asked myself what would happen if I sent the same message (describing a city) to two or three musicians in different parts of the world, and then put their sound responses together as one sound piece. I wondered if it were possible that their sound responses would tell me something about this place, and that by putting them together, something else could resonate. So, this is how I begin to articulate these 'vignettes' of the cities.

For the installation version of the piece, I put my voice back with the original messages, between vignette and vignette, because I thought it was necessary to show the originator of this process. And finally, I wanted to have a visual part, so my colleague Moises Horta, an AI artist, suggested that these messages could be interpreted through an Artificial Intelligence tool that synthesises images from words. I thought this last step could be interesting since these tools have been trained to identify and symbolically correlate words to text from people's data behaviour. So, he was the last collaborator to come on board. Also, aesthetically, the video he generated looks like cutting into a brain and looking into someone's thoughts.

You are a sound artist and a researcher at the same time, a practicing sound artist as well as someone who reflects upon various occurrences in experimental music and practice from a theoretical point of view. How do these two practices of yours influence each other in your work?

It has taken me a long time to figure that one out. I feel as if I was always a musician. There is an old photo of me trying to play the piano at age four. And I don't remember a time when I wasn't obsessed with making sounds with instruments. But then, after high school, society's influence made me think that playing weird music would never be a real source of income, so I went to university and studied art history, which I really enjoyed, with the idea of specialising in musicology.

But then – jump to the future – , in 2015, the shocking evidence pointed to the opposite: that academic life had become, in fact, the hobby, whereas making music had become the main act paying the bills – the joke is on society. So, I had to reassess my priorities. I had just moved to Berlin and decided that as part of this realisation, I was going to do a master's in arts that was practice-oriented.

After the past few years of struggling with switching 'primary' practice back and forth, I found a way to combine them more intelligently. I try to find commonalities and make them inform each other. Now it has become more fluid. I especially appreciate everything that lies in between.

Your lecture at CTM entitled "Action-based Sound and Cognitive Capitalism" talked, among other things, about the ways in which digital interfaces change our perception. How do you view the interplay between digital technologies, perception and sound as well as the future development of this interaction?

I do believe that new technologies alter the user's attention circuits and subjectivity in ways that we have not yet realised. But that lecture was more like a short provocation on an idea I had that took off from Murray Schafer's seminal book *The Soundscape*. He described the importance of the church bell as the sound that defined every medieval European city. Because the bell created an acoustic space in the centre of the city. The range of the church bell (where this sound could be heard) circumscribed the city. And in a way, also its religious dimension, signalling the divine Christian calendar.

I wanted to make a parallel with something Byung-Chul Han wrote about the smartphone being the devotional object of our era. If in the medieval age, we have this deafening metallic sound bell resonating from the centre of the feudal city, the very nucleus of society and belief back then. In present times, when European cities are disconnected from their production reality, smartphones produce short, discreet, user-friendly alarms that resonate in immaterial networks.

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Experimental music should not be so much about self-presentation

Interview with
Félicia Atkinson

French electro-acoustic composer and visual artist Félicia Atkinson has been active since the 2000s in various sonic guises and formations. She has co-founded Shelter Press with Bartolomé Sanson and is currently based in Normandy. She has collaborated with musicians including Jefre Cantu-Ledesma, Chris Watson, Christina Vantzou, and Stephen O'Malley, and with ensembles including Eklekto (Geneva) and Neon (Oslo). "For Félicia Atkinson, human voices inhabit an ecology alongside and within many other things that don't speak, in the conventional sense: landscapes, images, books, memories, ideas." (Thea Ballard)

"Building a record is like building a house: a structure in which one can encounter oneself, each room a song with its own function in the project of everyday life." From the liner notes accompanying your record *Image Langage*. Looking back at your work, what sort of houses would you say you have built? Are the individual pieces of the structure more important, or is it rather the house as a whole, with its history, genius loci...

At the moment of writing, my own house is in the process of being re-insulated with hemp and linen; all the walls are bare and some part of the roof. But soon my walls will be filled with the grasses that grow in the fields nearby to keep the wind out of the house. The only two rooms that are not torn apart now are the kitchen and the living room with the fireplace. Heat is something important and raises so many environmental questions.

Sometimes I see music like this: something that can heat your heart and gather together. Very ancestral powers of togetherness.

There was a huge storm last weekend here in the coastal region where I live and many roofs, electric power poles and trees were destroyed. It made me think about architecture.

I think we will keep building and re-building until the next time. Nothing is permanent, but it's interesting to wonder what enables you to stand, whether it's your bones, the structure of your walls, the river you follow, the wind, a hand...

There is an embedded dichotomy between the inside x outside in your work. Can you elaborate on how it relates to sound?

Well, sound travels. From outside through your ear and skin to the inside of your body and mind. And then it goes back again. To find ideas and inspiration I need to go out, walk, listen, be in motion. And then I go back and write, draw, record; it is a state of flux, a bit like the tides. I think we are constantly in between these two states. Somehow music passes through you, but then it also leaves you, it is a moving energy!

You mentioned in an interview that you were drawn into music by experimental poetry. Spoken word and voice remain important in your oeuvre. Can you talk about the importance of the voice and poetry in your work?

I love reading, but also listening to people's voices.

Poetry is a way for me to acknowledge that the world can't be totally understood, that the world is multiple, that you have to rethink the meanings of things all the time, that words don't have the same meaning depending on many things, so much depends on context. You have to read and question yourself, and read again. And question yourself again.

I love this in poetry. That it can take several times to get it. It's a long-term relationship with words.

What I find dazzling about poetry is that most of the time it's the opposite of a statement, it's a perpetual question. I feel full of questions!

Your latest release is inspired by the artist Georgia O' Keeffe. What importance has art, literature and culture and its history and development in general have for you and your work?

I am always wondering how people live. What it is to have a life's work. Whether it's an artist, a scientist, a cook, a gardener; How, during a whole life, people bear their work. How it affects their way of living. How it can become a whole ethic, or not. That's what interests me the most, I think.

Interestingly, the impact the work of others has on you is not literal – rather, you mention a certain "deviation", a certain creative dérive from the original, let's say.

I think works communicate with other works. See how Derek Jarman's garden at Prospect Cottage has inspired many people. Jarman is not there anymore, but every day his films, his music, his writing and his gardening have an effect on people. I feel moved by it.

And I absolutely love the situationist word *dérive*, absolutely. I often *dérive* from art to music to gardening, etc.;. One practice feeds the other. It's an ecosystem!

You mentioned that you've never really had a studio per se. That you've worked on the road, or wherever possible. Can you talk about your compositional process?

Most of the work I do is improvised. Which means I separate the moment when I think/research from the moment when I create. It's two different phases of one process. For example, when I play live, I never know what I'm gonna play on the piano or say with my voice. But the electronic part is recorded, and lays a path I'll follow, a structure that will draw the architecture of the form in which I'll perform. Most of the time, I record with my phone (voice, field recording) and record the electronics with my laptop and keyboard in the room I happen to be in. But I also love 'real studios', it's just that it's very rare that I have the opportunity to get into one. One day I would love to build one in my garden.

In one interview you said: "Also, as a woman, I feel it's important to re-interpret, re-phrase things or sounds that were made by men, and perform a «sex change» operation on them." Do you think this has changed when you compare it to the period in the 2000s when you were starting your career?

What I meant is that a sound or a phrase can have multiple genders. I also like the word 'interpretation'. It doesn't mean you modify what the writer meant, it means you perform it in a different way, like an actor performing a theatre text.

I love this idea that sometimes a text can inhabit different bodies.

I can read Kerouac out loud even though I am not a man. It will sound different and therefore maybe have a different meaning, the text detaching itself from the writer to open itself up again to the performer or reader. I am interested in that flux/superposition.

This is why I love text. Because you can choose who performs it, and there can be many voices.

The music situation is certainly more open now, but there is still progress to be made in different fields. For example, social rights for musicians/composers that would allow musicians/composers from different classes to make a living from their art so that you don't need to come from a rich background to make it work.

Speaking from what I know, for example: I am a mom, and it's complicated to have a career as a 42-year-old musician, a female who is a mom, because the system was not made for us 40-something moms. We are the oddballs in the room. It's a subject that is not very interesting for people. But musicians should be able to educate their children well and travel (or not travel) with them safely. I think the fact that your fee feeds your family is something that should not be annoying.

More in general, I think experimental music should not be about image and self-promotion and should be more about being open to different kinds of fragilities and strengths.

This is why it's called experimental! Because it's the opposite of mainstream, because it's about trying, experimenting; taking risks. It also allows you to make mistakes in your music. But also to feel a bit safe there while doing so, to feel a community of audience and crew who together hold a kind of safety net, so that when you take that risk, you are not alone when you land.

That's what I think is the most precious thing in this scene. Most people care a lot about each other and we should always keep that in mind.

Experimental music should not be so much about self-presentation.

I think what I first liked about experimental gigs was that they were where the shy/odd, weird people would go.

You co-founded the Shelter Press imprint with Bartolomé Sanson. How important is it for you to support the work of other artists, how does it differ from working on your own career?

Community! Reciprocity! You know, we do most of our work at home. We don't have interns, we don't have staff, we don't even have a fancy office.

Bartolomé has a great capacity to work; he is the structure that makes our Shelter Press stand. I am just the co-pilot since we also have a child to raise together. And I feel very lucky to be surrounded by the artists we work with. We have mostly known them for a long time, and there's a real relationship between us and them.

Where do you see yourself in 20 years?

Let's touch wood! In 20 years, I will be 62. At last, the end of our mortgage ahha!

I hope I'll still be able to make music and art, and still have decent enough fees so I can pay the doctor if I need to go or repair my roof. Our son will be an adult!

One thing for sure is that I won't have a pension, which is why this house we are living in, the garden we have, and the community around us are very precious.

I hope there won't be a global war and that we'll find ways to establish peace in the world, and that we'll take better care of our planet than we do now.

I think about this every day, and it's a process that starts now. We need to be kind and hospitable despite everything, to respect this old spinning rock that we're only visiting for a while.

Photo Eleonore Huisse
Originally published on November 11, 2023.

How do you play a city?

Interview with
Yara Mekawei

The sonic bricolages of prolific artist and scholar Mekawei draw inspiration from the dynamic flow of urban centres and the key infrastructure of cities. Interested in the philosophy of architecture, social history, and philosophical literature, Mekawei implements an optical transaction on a musical conversation and transforms sound waves into visual forms. Her work is based on sound as an essential tool of vision, and the philosophy of its composition is shaped by sophisticated practices that express its conceptual dimension to the public.

You are interested in sound and architecture. I'm curious about how you perceive the city sonically. In every city you do field recordings – do you think that every city has a very specific sonic signature or sonic identity?

It's kind of like sonic fingerprints for each city, each district as well. For example, I've been quite familiar with Berlin for a long time and each district has a special atmosphere. There are differences between the seasons, tourist and residential areas, shopping centres, the traffic. There are common points – the noise of the people talking in the street and how the architecture and the infrastructure of the city amplify the sound or host the sound. However, on another level, there are different languages, different slang, different kinds of dialogue.

Do you feel that issues like gentrification are changing cities in terms of their sound?

The dynamic of a city depends on several things, like the season, immigration, the social and economic situation, etc, and that influences the soundscape, too.

There's also a lot of discussion about how affluent people want silence where they live, they don't want any sort of sound pollution. So it's also an economic question.

Yes. And this is also one of the points in my study, not only in Berlin, but in many cities that I travel through, or even in Cairo, I mean, as you said, rich people would like to avoid the crowds, would like to avoid the public. And they would like to stay apart in compounds, which also have a different type of noise, by the way.

How do you sonically translate this research in these urban centres, with all their complex stories and histories?

I have used various ways to present the field records, but a long time ago, I would make field records in the buildings in urban centres, of the frequency of the concrete of each building.

What was really interesting for me was to observe the buildings and the architecture in each district as elements amplifying sound. It's like a mic and a speaker, in a different way. Each building hosts a lot of sounds made by the people who work and live there. The building itself, its construction, the concrete, the ceiling, each have different types of sound frequency. It's a dialogue between people, streets, and buildings, which are like big speakers that speak to each other.

And how do you approach your work practically – what does your field work and the preparation look like?

Actually, it depends. Sometimes I spend a month in a city, for example, in November I was at a residency in Malta. It takes me three weeks to understand a city – mentally and sonically – before I start recording. After Malta, I was on tour in Istanbul. I only spent two weeks there, but I knew exactly what I wanted to record. Based on my Sufi research, I focused on the mosque, the church, and the call for prayer.

Are there any places that have surprised you so far?

Malta was a massive surprise for me. In many neighbourhoods and districts you cannot hear the local language, which really surprised me. It is weird when you go to a city and you don't hear the local language. There's a big gap between the original residents and tourists and others who came to live there. I was working in Sicily and there was no one that spoke English, and that was fine for me.

I guess it's also hard because you also don't want to be like a voyeur. The question of the ethics of recording and field recording is a complex one. How do you work with field recordings that have recognisable voices on them?

I ask before I record. I'm a sound collector. I don't have a camera like a tourist; I just have my recorder. I like to collect sounds. It's a friendly

way of seeing people; they may not have a common language, but they have a common sound. I'm from Cairo, and since the revolution, it has become so hard to walk in the city with a recorder and ask people to say something unless you know them personally. Especially recently, I've worked on many projects that incorporated work with an open mic. Also with radio live broadcasting, it's a big question what and how to stream and capture. For me, it's really important to have permission.

What interests you about a place before you go and record there?

In the last two years, I've worked with artists from Leipzig on a research project about socialist architecture. It was really interesting for me to discover the social architecture and the social urban designs of East Germany and compare them to social housing in Cairo. Two years of discovering different types of architecture and how they affect the neighbourhoods: their history and the future. Another perspective is language. My Sufi research is also about language, love, God and the prophets, philosophers.

I was also wondering about your album titles because they're all numbers or years.

I sometimes compose music based on numbers, their coding. For me, numbers are neutral. You don't have any emotions, feelings. You just have to listen and remember, understand. I don't want to give those really nice romantic titles to my albums.

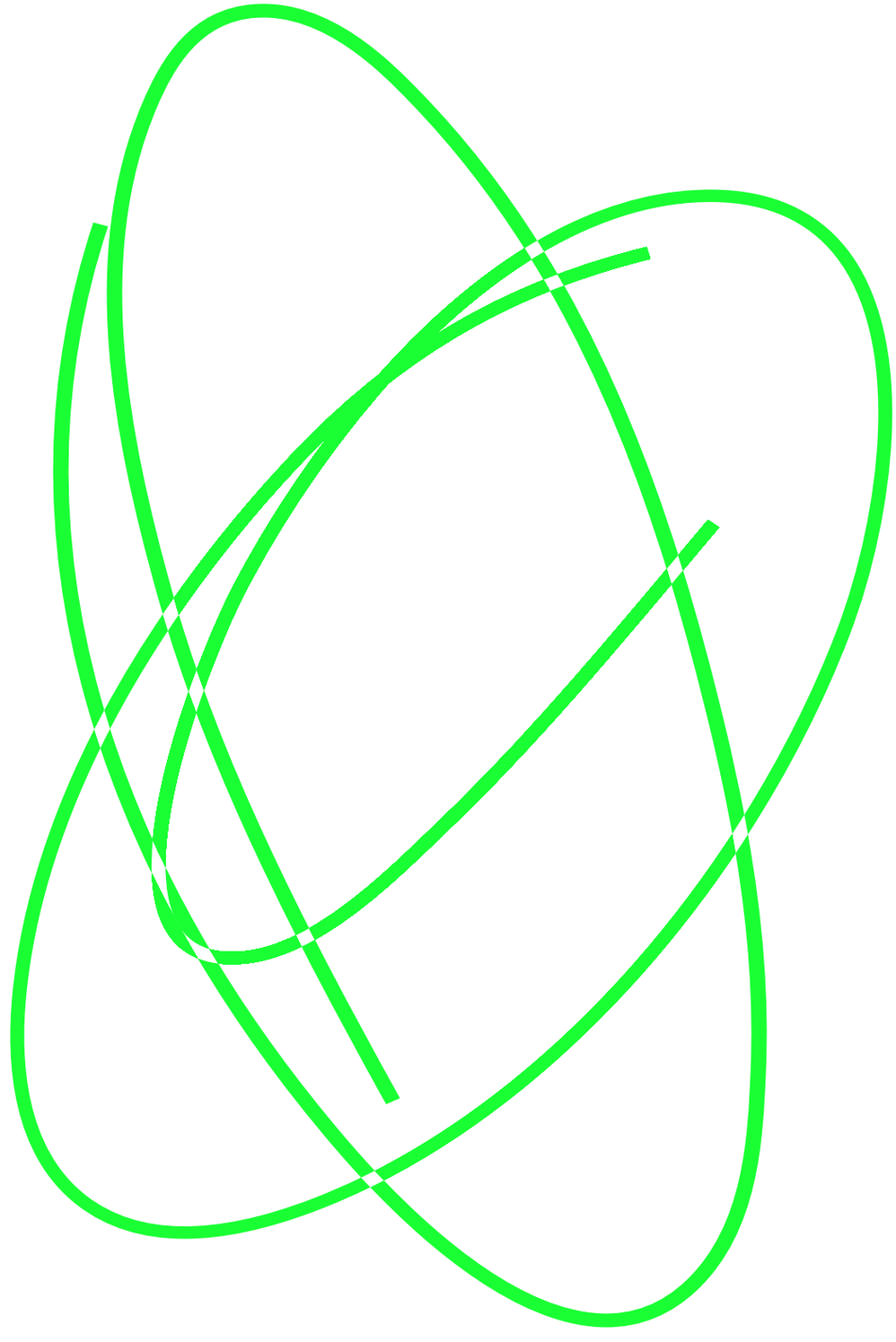
When you work on your music, do you have an audience in mind and how they will receive and perceive your sounds?

That is a really good question. It takes a long time to produce the pieces. When people listen online, it's hard to get feedback from them. People come and talk to me after my live sets. They ask about the story behind my compositions. I'm using religious texts, voice-overs. The audience cares, and listens. And I feel that this kind of 'analogue' relation to the listeners is really important.

Does the feedback from the audience/listeners influence you when you work on a new project?

Yes, totally. After my third album, I started to do listening sessions. I pick tracks I'm working on and share them with the audience. Sometimes these are online – reading and listening sessions.

Listening as a communal activity. I also wanted to ask about the aspects of cultural identity and feminism in your work.



In my region, it's tricky for a woman, a Muslim Egyptian in the MENA region, to play sound. There's the geopolitical situation, too. It also pertains to my Sufi research, which works with religious texts, connecting not only Islam, but also Christianity and Judaism. You can listen to my work and hear the female voice interpreting the male text. A female voice reading a religious text. All these things are under my skin; I cannot run away from them.

It is hard to break through the male dominance in these realms, and this is global, to an extent.

I agree. Now I'm in Berlin, and I'm totally into the game, you know? This endless game of females and males, the nationalities and the mother tongues. I just try to keep myself on track.

The role of women has been changing throughout the history and across various geographies.

Women did have power in different spots around the world, in different civilisations. However, there is always some man who destroys this history. This is also one of the aims of my Sufi research, to search for this history. I'm working with texts by male writers, but there is a bunch of undiscovered literature by female authors. So it is there, but no one talks about it.

Women also often published books under male monikers.

Exactly. It's in all civilisations.

And what are you currently working on?

I'm continuing to work on my Sufi research, which I would like to finish this year. It's based on the female writers in Sufi history. It's linked to what we've been talking about because it takes a long time to find the books and the history and the texts relating to these amazing women.

Can you tell us more about this Sufi research project?

My research began with a questioning of my own faith and thoughts, which seemed different from the common beliefs of the Muslim community in Egypt where I grew up. Apart from my political, economic, and social background, my passion led me to delve into Sufi philosophy and read ancient literature written in my mother tongue, which I also found difficult to grasp immediately.

My passion for invoking sounds and images of the past led me to develop my own way of reviving old texts audio-visually using hisāb 'ljumal, or Abjad Numerals, wherein numbers and dates are represented alphabetically by assigning specific numeric values to each letter. Historically, the Sufi used this method to interpret holy words by analysing their respective numbers.

What is going to be the output of your research?

A sound composition. I would also like to accompany it with a long text.

Are you also travelling and recording in different places?

I wish, but I don't have the money to travel. It's really hard, especially because I'm working with Persian texts, so it's Iran, Iraq...

So you basically have to do the research online?

Yes. Online and via friends of friends who write to writers who give me historical books. I've been doing this research for three years already, so hopefully this year I'll finish it.

Is psychogeography something you are interested in when doing field research? The atmosphere of a place, the genius loci, as they say. You feel it is different in every place – with some places you connect, with some you don't.

It's a complex thing. Actually, since I started working on the soundscape of cities and their architecture, I believe that you can live in a particular city all your life, but the city still controls you. And you don't even have to live somewhere for a year, and you can totally understand the city, the people, how you deal with it day to day, even if it's not your home.

How do you play a city? It's kind of like I'm a part of a game. You don't win all the time. You don't lose all the time. You have ups and downs, like sound waves.

Photo PX
Originally published on February 19, 2023.

I miss Kyiv

Interview with Maryana Klochko

Maryana Klochko is a music producer, vocalist and film composer born in Western Ukraine and based in Kyiv. In her work she often works with the unconscious, through lyrics and vocal parts; she seeks a balance between the real and the fictional. She perceives music as storytelling, finding many visual images in the composition that come to life through sound. Maryana holds an MA in interior design from Lviv Academy of Arts, Ukraine. An art education strongly influenced her perception of music. Her work focuses on experimental, pop, club, post-apocalyptic folk and ambient music.

I wanted to ask, Maryana, how and where are you at the moment?

I am currently living in Berlin. I came here at the end of the summer for a short residency as part of the Artist at Risk programme, and after it ended, I planned to return to Ukraine.

But then my plans began to change. In the fall, I had several performances scheduled, and in December, I received an invitation to write music for a film with a particular deadline, so I decided to stay in Berlin a little longer. (At the end of last year, the situation with electricity in Ukraine was very unstable, due to massive, constant shelling of the energy infrastructure by the Russians, and it was quite difficult to work on music in such conditions). I'm going to stay here for a while until I finish the album and then I'll decide according to the situation. To be honest, I've been missing home, and I miss Kyiv.

It's been one year (interview conducted in 2023 – note) since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Many Ukrainian artists have since become ambassadors of Ukrainian culture, drawing attention to the many often overlooked producers and artists from the country. You have also introduced fellow musicians in your mixes, for instance in the NTS mix you have made for SHAPE+.

I have a special history with mixes, it's a format that gives me a lot of freedom. I see an important goal in presenting Ukrainian music, because it seems to be in its own 'bubble', so I want it to be heard outside of that 'bubble' because it deserves that attention.

People in Ukraine have always generally been very musical; I'm extremely interested in this phenomenon. Singing has accompanied people in different circumstances for ages, and now, in times of war, I think about it a lot. After the invasion began, I moved from Kyiv to my parents' house in the Lviv region. Even though it was much safer there than in other regions of our country, I was under a lot of stress and couldn't write or even listen to music.

Timur Dzhafarov (a Ukrainian musician known as John Object, who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine a year ago*) expressed an interesting thought in one of his recent interviews, that in conditions of war - sounds become signals that you have to react to in a certain way; at some point the sounds are no longer perceived as music, but as signs.

Of course, there is a difference in what soldiers hear on the front line and the sounds that surround people in the city, but I just think about how in Ukraine, since the start of the Russian invasion, the soundscape has changed drastically. And obviously, the relationship with music has also changed for many people. I also feel this impact on myself.

Would you be able to elaborate - how has the soundscape changed for you since the war?

For example, in Ukraine, people in cities are warned about the air danger by an air raid warning signal. It is switched on when radars detect the launch of a missile carrier, a kamikaze drone, or a rocket. There is a certain algorithm of actions that you need to do as soon as you hear this siren. You need to go to the shelter, or hide at home in a place that is protected by at least two walls; often these temporary shelters are just apartment corridors or bathrooms, etc. The second siren sound means that the air raid warning has been cancelled, that the danger of a missile attack has passed, and then you return to your normal life, come out of the shelter. Just imagine that these signals sound quite often - in the middle of the night, during the day, in the evening, at any time... It's hard to forget and put these sounds out of your head, and when you hear something like this even somewhere conditionally safe, your body immediately responds with panic. I'm talking about myself and my reactions, maybe someone else's are different. Or the sound of a scooter or a motorbike outside the window is quite similar to the sound of an Iranian shahid, but when you have heard something explode afterwards, heard the windows shake in your apartment, you immediately perceive this tone as aggressive and dangerous.

Also, since there is a curfew in Ukrainian cities during martial law, the nights have become incredibly quiet, and it is forbidden to move around the streets after 11 pm. It's hard to imagine how quiet cities can be in such conditions. Also, it is sometimes difficult for me to listen to a drum roll at high volume, or any sound that vaguely reminds me of a siren or explosion,

because it all undermines reality and becomes disturbing. I'll never forget how on New Year's Eve, people in Berlin were setting off fireworks for 6-7 hours in a row, these sounds were just driving me crazy; it was impossible not to hear them, all the whistling and explosions sounded very realistic.

Storytelling is an important part of your work. Can you talk about some of the narratives that you work with?

I love working with words, playing with their meanings. For me, the word in music works as an additional semantic melody. Sometimes I have dreams that I do not remember when I wake up. I get up in a semi-conscious state, that certain moment when I can't 'hold the dream' in my hands anymore, but my hands still remember what shape it was. In those moments, I write and capture everything that comes to mind with words, and the text grows on its own, forming a plotline. Sometimes these texts appear as lyrics in my songs. Sometimes they just remain as a text. At some point, I realised it's all part of the same process for me, words are not always necessary, sometimes a state is conveyed only by sounds, timbre, rhythm, noise, or, finally, silence. The most important role of storytelling in my work is the need to express myself with words, and I believe that at some point this necessity sparked my desire to create music. This process is very therapeutic for me

Is folk music something that inspires you?

There is a huge song tradition in Ukraine that goes back a long way, and the songs vary greatly in each region, and cover countless themes. However, for a long time, folk music didn't really resonate with me, it seemed to me that it was something too 'ancient' for me to understand and accept 'now'. But a few years ago, I changed my mind. In 2019, when I was living in Lviv, friends often gathered at our house, and on one of those evenings, at a certain point they started singing folk songs that many of those present knew. What my ears heard that evening stirred my heart and continues to infect me with its beauty to this day. Since that moment, I have become very interested in folk music. My former roommate Zoë taught me many songs, and we used to sing them together at home. In some of my current works, I even use fragments of these songs, blending them with electronic music. It's such a vast field for exploration that it's hard to even imagine. I would be happy if my music helps someone else discover these wonderful things.

You have also worked in film, and your compositions are cinematic and atmospheric. How do you approach working in the audiovisual realm?

My music first appeared in a film almost by chance. In 2017, I was simply asked for permission to use one song as part of a movie soundtrack. At the time, I was performing only acoustically with a guitar. That was probably the first time I ever thought about my music as something that could exist in a visual reality. It was such a small point from which the process then began to develop further.

In cinema, the role of the soundtrack can be very different. It's like a spice - unnoticed, but it has a great impact on taste and emphasises it. When I work with audiovisual reality, I constantly think about the context in which the music appears. It is important to hear and understand the entire diegetic component of the frame in order to find a way to organically integrate it into this space and understand what exactly it should be. It's like a kind of big comprehensive exercise in attentiveness. The approach to composing music for films has another interesting feature: I, as an artist, am completely subordinate to the director, who is the absolute - who sees, hears, and knows the story best. In a sense, I partially deny myself, my ego, and become a cog in someone else's machine.

In addition, the director has a distance from the material, and with this fresh perspective, he or she usually understands better than I do whether it's 'it' or not. Music is no different from, for example, painting: to see what you've done, you have to step back and look at your work from a distance. A composer doesn't always have this distance, often the deadlines are so tight that the distance doesn't exist. That's why I really appreciate the director's ability to 'see' the music. From my side, work with film develops empathy and helps with understanding the world better. I really like that.

How can we, the music community, help Ukrainian artists right now?

There are many different initiatives in Ukraine right now that are bringing Ukraine closer to victory. I will add some links below. By supporting them, you are also supporting Ukrainian artists, because all of this makes it possible for Ukrainian artists to live, work, create, etc.

LIVYJ BEREH – a volunteer group based in Kyiv and working in regions affected by the war. Raising funds, helping to rebuild houses, distribute food, medication and other materials in liberated cities of Ukraine

Kyiv Angels is a charity foundation helping civilians and military in Ukraine's hotspots.

Hospitallers – a Ukrainian volunteer medical battalion

Come Back Alive – a foundation providing assistance to the military since 2014

Originally published in 2023

Is it order?
Is it chaos?

Interview with
Paul Gründorfer

Artistic practice within the scope of conceptual and process art, site-specific intervention, sound sculpture and performance. Paul Gründorfer develops process-related systems and explores variable or unstable conditions within the occurrence of sound when exposed to amplification, feedback and plural signal streams. His works focus on processes that evolve in a social space, where sound is considered a found object and event that directly relates to, influences and reflects the environment. They deal with the instability of systems, questioning the role of control and reaction, and researching the mechanisms of hidden signals.

You just had a residency at Prague's MeetFactory (interview conducted in 2024 – note) as part of your SHAPE+ participation. What project did you do there?

Before coming to Prague, I was thinking about a setup with different speakers – multitimbral diffusion. Although I don't generally use multi-channel systems or follow any kind of simulated acoustic environments – maybe because they behave differently when it comes to the live aspect of getting into a state or a zone of sound or something that's uncertain or unstable.

I talked to Maria Komarova, whom I met through a friend, and we thought we could work with amplification levels. She is using analogue elements that are also in a certain state of balance, unbalance or correlation.

We played with a system we called trees or towers, which has different resonances, speaker characteristics and amplification, and no locatable sound sources. We integrated these two approaches to digital signal processing and analogue actions with feedback.

Because you also work now with site-specific processes that are developing in interaction with an environment.

At least this is a starting point for how to approach a certain setting, to think about how a setting can be influenced or transformed into another situation by sound or some kind of intervention in space. It's probably correlated to presence.

We came from different areas, but were thinking about sound as a presence. Michal Cáb has done more conceptual actions before, like releasing cicadas as 'bioterrorist composers' in the Czech parliament, for instance.

Is it also important if an audience is present or not?

That's the difficult thing about these interventions, you do them for a certain time, and then they are gone. Installation work has the quality of being there for a longer timeframe, as something that is constantly happening for people to experience it in different states. But perhaps the essence of interventions is the possibility of thinking about its happening. What could happen?

I once was part of a project in a remote place. A friend of mine, Nicolás Spencer, started the project *Terra Ignota,* researching the south of Chile. We went to oil refineries and to nature parks, both in the old Yahgan and Selk'nam areas, indigenous land. There you can still experience immersive nature, but also repeating social power structures. It's very remote and scarcely populated.

We worked on projects concerning the strong winds there – a kite for a VLF antenna and an oscillation system with wind. We did it for the few people present, but then we also took part in the Tsonami Festival. So in the end, you transport this impression of what could have happened and maybe, in an extended form, of what is still an issue there.

So there, for example, there is still this issue about how indigenous lands and people were occupied by the Chilean and Argentinian governments, and then, as an artist, what do you do there with the wind? You make an intervention, but then it's gone again.

But meanwhile, you meet quite different people while working there... for example, we were staying on the island of Cape Horn, and there was just this family with three kids living there at the military outpost because they take care of the area. We ended up being stuck there for days due to severe winds. And in the end, we did these interventions on the island with the kids. One of them was accompanying us all the time through the thickets on the island. We flew the kite and did antenna measurements, recordings and some documentation together. In a way, if there's no audience, it still happened, I guess.

With a lot of these installations, the documentation of an installation is kind of like the work itself, because if there's no audience, or if you make a piece of art without an audience, what role does it have?

It is also related to how things are perceived, advertised, represented. There are different situations where it has different effects. If you make something visible, hearable, something that seems attractive, people go there, but what happens then in that space: Is it order? Is it chaos? Something that was expected? Is it prepared? Is there some risk?

These questions could also be related to experimental sound itself. It's more about having the chance to somehow find a trace – whether it's technical or it's abstract or conceptual, and as long as this is possible, you can get something back that's not just a product. And then the question about the public, or how big your audience is, is not so important because it can offer something to anyone present. You also have to question what their position is. I think it's more an open discussion or confrontation.

It's interesting, the question of who all this is for, whether people do it for themselves, as art for art's sake, or for their fellow artists? Or actually for an audience.

It depends on how you balance it and what themes you are dealing with. Whether it's a social and kind of site-specific, maybe environmental concept. Maybe you also don't find things without having this kind of confrontation or an emancipatory thought about communication or exchange with people.

Is there a more political aspect that influences your work or it is more the aesthetic, formalistic side that you're interested in?

Hm, I think the way of making something happen and how to organise that is also a way to integrate or to approach social and political issues. Also within the abstract work of sound itself.

With friends, I have organised various concert series or happenings, open space parkours. It's about creating possibilities. Someone might be interested, others might not. If it's accessible or if there's some open kind of transformation or confrontation that you didn't expect, it's a way to proceed. Maybe from the participants' side, or from your side, or you fail or whatever.

How much does feedback influence you, feedback in the literal sense, site-specific feedback?

It is not so much that people give you direct feedback, but you hear and you experience with different perspectives and perceptions of people. So if you listen together, it changes the way you approach or listen, especially to process-oriented sound – sometimes you hear it differently and then you understand something else that's only possible with others.

And also the space itself; I guess it also has its own communication with people. Do you prepare ahead of performances, or there is also room for improvisation?

I have always been interested in exploring things, even if they are not solved from my side. I am particularly intrigued by non-pre-recorded, but very functional sound happenings. And then there are so many possibilities to work with. People have different knowledge or strategies, so if you encounter something that you didn't know before, for me it's worth spending time trying to make it happen.

If you have to plan exactly what the outcome will be, it's much harder because you want to control it. So maybe that's my personal strategy. I prepare what I know or what I have available and then in some way react to a certain space or environment.

I did a project with high-intensity light controlled by audio input. I was more interested in what happens when DSP audio is directly connected to amplify light and whether you perceive something else within that audio domain when it's somehow also visible but ephemeral, like audio. When I tested it, it was quite intense, ghostly. And then you might have to adjust and calibrate it to make it work for others.

You also work with unstable systems, systems that can fall apart at any time. How do you work with that?

That's kind of how I started, because I had no idea how to produce electronic music.

But I found this no-input mixing strategy, where you put the output back into the input and you have a circular system, which is a kind of an oscillation, but it doesn't behave linearly. With this aspect you introduce a kind of unpredictability, but at the same time, you gain some surprise.

It's about this balance: if you have a lot of surprises, you might be disappointed. But if you control everything, you have to think about your surprises beforehand and then it's not a surprise anymore.

In this way, I think the unstable things also come from researching how technology works, because you have a vast amount of possibilities and you want them to function. But what does it mean to function or not to function?

So, if you take it apart a little – and that was the start – how does signal communication work? An antenna and the transmission of data, streaming to access points where you have your IP address. But what if you have an open transmission such as radio? Using old and new technology makes you think about questions like: Is it still accessible? Can you modify it or take it apart? Not just to modify it for your use, but to see what's going on through that technology.

The possibilities are also endless, especially with a lot of new technologies, you can do nothing and everything.

Yeah, horrible, it also needs constant attention. A friend and I built a sound sculpture during lockdown and it worked fine. We have now been invited to show it again, so we have to put it all back into the 'black box'. It's also strange to reanimate technology.

Also how people used it back then, and how they use the same technologies now with knowledge of newer technologies. Whether you approach old technologies with the mindset of working with new technologies.

You also grow up with a certain approach and generational perception and then you see young people doing crazy stuff and old people don't know what it is or what it means.

I'm also interested in that transformation, that kind of change.

Have you been surprised by some of the reactions of these processes that you've been doing?

There are certain things you need to control, and maybe you'll find a little path that opens up that it's done by itself. Sometimes it's enough not to control it. I think the most surprising was when someone showed me how to build a small AM transmitter. He knew how to do it because he worked in cave research.

The researchers go into a cave and they can't communicate with current technology because there's a lot of stone mass to go through, so they need a certain old school technique – AM radio.

I wanted to do something with small AM transmitter zones. Like there were these micro-transceiver projects from the 70s/80s in Italy and Japan. They had these open network transmission strategies, but with FM.

It was a bit difficult and took some time to build the AM circuit because it is a resonant circuit and has to be calibrated, otherwise it burns and then all the radios blast away with sound. So I was always afraid of burning it again.

Then I was part of a small exhibition in St. Petersburg, next to the Hermitage. At one point I heard all this crackling noise from the radios and I thought they were on fire, but they were working fine. And then I saw the lights in the main building fluctuating. So there was no constant current from the main power grid. And this small electromagnetic field was connected to this huge empire of a power system and was reacting to it with distortion in the AM field from time to time.

And the same thing then happened in Beijing, where I had a residency. It behaved in the same way and it somehow sounded more interesting than when I was developing it, because it had these noise bursts and was influenced by and also pointing to something much bigger.

In Vienna, you're also involved in several institutions like Velak and others.

Well, I have tried to organise some concert series and spaces. There's a platform that's been around for a long time, but it's still a bit underground and these days nomadic, called Velak, which I've been involved with for quite some time.

You're soon going to the legendary EMS Studio residency in Stockholm.

I'm lucky at the moment. I don't know. It's a glitch in the system. Then I'm also going to Brussels to Q-02 for another residency.

Will you develop a different project for each residency or will you concentrate on your own work?

I will try to do something similar with these tower speaker systems and how they behave in space. Which is kind of related to feedback. How they behave when they are directly bound to the sound source, or when they are diffused in a kind of unlocatable way. I think that's the research I'm interested in at the moment, and how to make generative or non-predictable small fragments of data for sound.

Do you do art full time?

I try to. But in the past I've worked for galleries and set up exhibitions, done audio engineering and recording for TV and cinema, built PA systems for locations, done some teaching courses... I still do all of that, of course, and work for people who need some sort of technical solution, if I can manage to provide it.

Is your background more artistic or technological?

I would have liked to learn more about some technological aspects, so I'm still struggling with that. But I think I started 'researching' by just taking random photos, more like intervention. And somehow, through all this, I ended up studying at the art academy, for a while also with Harun Farocki, who initiated a discursive platform about 'moving images' and opened up a context for research – in relation to movie and documentary film and how image and also narrative are shaped, and how we can analyse them from multiple perspectives.

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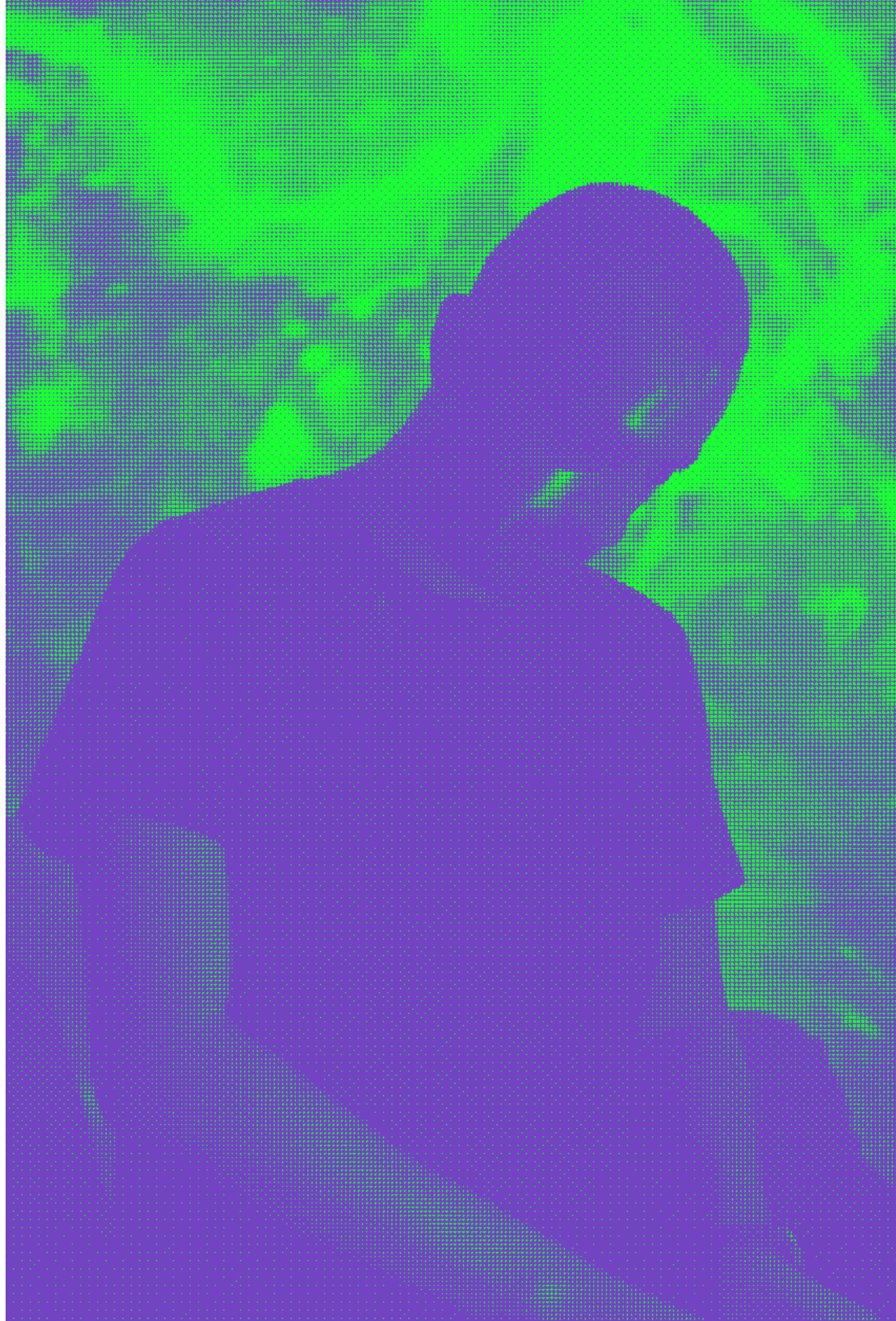
The future has been completely uncancelled in music

Interview with ABADIR



ABADIR (Rami Abadir) is a music producer and sound designer who was born in Cairo, Egypt. His work focuses on experimental, club, glitch and ambient music, and he's one half of the duo 0N4B. ABADIR holds an MA in Digital Media Design from the University of the Arts, Bremen.

When I hear the dramaturgy of your tracks, the bass and oscillation between suspense and release, wrapped in an ethereal haunted vocal veil, I imagine a world that has passed us by, with its lingering Mark Fisherian ghosts. Can you talk about the aesthetic and conceptual worlds that your music stems from?

My approach to each album is different. Every project has its own context and depends on several factors, like personal experience, how I'm feeling, the change of the seasons, what I'm reading and what I'm listening to. The context is always important, so, for instance, I couldn't deliver a club album in the middle of the pandemic, so I was more into making music for listening. But the common element in my music is connecting with people/listeners, it's about communication, and I tend in my music to combine what is familiar, weird and possibly unexpected. There are not so many conceptual worlds or critical issues I'm trying to tackle or solve in my music, although I'm very much into theory when it comes to reading. The only exception was my master's thesis project, which is related to nostalgia in late capitalist societies, and there are some concepts related to Grafton Tanner, Nick Srnicek and a bit of Mark Fisher (from his *Postcapitalist Desire* phase); it's a 45-minute sound piece, hopefully, to be released next year. In a nutshell, my music focuses more on communicating with listeners, and I think it's also emotionally charged.

My aesthetics are usually heavily influenced by the very wide selection of music I listen to, which is why I don't like to stick to a single sound. The club influences in my latest album, *Mutate*, are quite obvious. In other works, like *Pause/Stutter/Uh/Repeat*, I created epic sounds using choir, organ, harsh synth, and heavy drums and glitches in between. On a different occasion, like in *Liminal*, I chose to make an ambient, contemplative sound. Speaking about Fisherian ghosts, my use of the archive is entirely unrelated to hauntology. On the contrary, it's to create new sounds. I'm actually not a big fan of hauntology's mournful sense and connection to the failure or the cancellation of the future. This could have been valid in the 2000s, but in my opinion, the future has been completely uncancelled in music over the last decade, and especially during the last years. In addition, the whole theorisation behind the cancellation of the future is based mostly on a local

British context, and I think the failure of the future or the disappearance of what is new isn't applicable in other regions.

You also mentioned in an interview you are "absolutely against nostalgia." Are the future and futurism things you are interested in? How to make sounds that are unheard?

That was a big statement, I guess, haha, I wouldn't say that now. I think my old point of view against nostalgia was a reaction to the rise of a nostalgic wave in Egypt from 2013/14. Broadly speaking, there are of course very negative aspects of nostalgia, but we can't totally avoid it, we are humans with memories and emotions, and the question is how to use nostalgia or engage with the past in a subversive way and without mourning. In his book *The Hours Have Lost Their Clocks*, Grafton Tanner deeply analyses nostalgia, its bad corporate and political side, but also acknowledges it and offers a way to deal creatively with the past.

I'm not interested in futurism anymore, I'm rather living the present, creating stuff and getting inspired by others in the present and trying to push forward the potential embedded in the past without mourning it, and using it creatively with the aim of creating something 'new'. I think the whole relationship between what is new and the future has become exhausted; this relationship is not even new anymore and I think there must be more factors determining what is new rather than tying it to the future. The whole theorisation about futurism and the future was for me dated after Covid. Covid was a turning point for me, as it proved that the future isn't guaranteed; we speculate a lot, get obsessed with the future, and then an event comes to destroy all of this. However, many artists and players in the scene still continued with their futuristic themes. For me, this seemed like escaping to the future, which is similar to escaping to the past.

The idea of the future has become a cliché, especially when it comes to understanding and decoding various non-Western cultures. According to the Western mindset, a 'new' or an unheard or unseen thing in Asia, Africa, or the Arab region is perceived or imposed as the future, and the reason is that many perceive it as an alien coming from a different dimension, so the easiest way to think about their music or art is to brand it as 'Future cyber-African post-you name the rest'. This shows a lack of effort to ask, learn and understand and trace the origins and the various factors behind this music and art, (theoretically it's very idealistic rather than materialistic) and a failure to perceive it as music that belongs to a certain geographical region, where artists use their cultural (and internet) influences through common technology. When it comes to non-Western electronic music, the use of the term 'future' is reduced to an alien artist doing weird things, or simply the 'other'. This 'future' is forced on artists whose concepts and music are not even future-based.

In order to make sounds that are unheard, I think one needs to do one's best to

listen to a very wide spectrum of music from different times and regions; passion and curiosity are the key elements here. So, being an expert sound designer or producer is never enough.

Have you been influenced by Cairo's sonic topographies – in terms of its 'natural' sounds of the city (car horns, clacking, chattering, the daily hustle and bustle, basically) to its musical (e.g. Mahraganat, etc.).

In terms of sound, I think I must be unconsciously affected by Cairo's natural sounds. I felt this so much when I moved to Germany and I realised I can't stand small (or relatively small) cities like Bremen, partly because of their quietness. Recently, I've been using samples related to Egypt and its music and implementing natural sounds from Cairo, as they are full of life and unpredictable, especially in busy areas. You can hear them in "El 3ataba Interlude" and "Ya Nasim" from *Mutate*. I'm personally more into Egyptian music from the 90s and before, and yes, I like Mahraganat. To what extent all this has influenced me, I'm not sure.

You studied digital media design in Bremen. How has this influenced your sound design and its deconstruction?

Studying digital media played an important role in conceptualising my music. Before, it was leaning towards formalism. I didn't resist conceptualising my music, but I was very aware of not forcing any narrative on my music and not compromising my music for the sake of narrative. This was refreshing, inspiring, and opened many doors for me in making music and enhancing my sound design.

You have been connected to the Arab sonic world. How do you see its development (although it's clear it's not a monolithic scene), and what are some of your favourite producers or projects?

The Arab region is now very active, thanks to a rise in the number of producers and DJs. There's a big lack in the number of venues in each city compared to big cities in Europe, but this doesn't stop the electronic music community from growing. Every year there are new names, from Morocco and Tunisia to Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine, for instance. You can check some of this new generation of great producers from Egypt in the latest compilation by Irsh, such as Itfll, Qow, Postdrone, Ashrar, Yaseen and Assyouti. There are also many other favourite producers, such as Ismael, ZULI, 1127, Onsy, Kareem Lotfy and 3Phaz. I also like a lot the latest projects by Julmud, Liliane Chlela, Najib, Nancy Mounir, Toumba, oldyungmayn, Van Boom, D3M0R, the ambient stuff by FRKTL, Pie Are Squared, Obay Alsharani and the crafty sound design of Disektor.

You have an album called *Mutate* on SVBKVLT. "Instead of 'deconstructing' or generally looking beyond club music, I made some fatty, straight-up dance floor music" is how you described it. Can you elaborate?

I recorded *Mutate* with the mindset of making an accessible club album. I find deconstructing club or music, and post-club is just another way to label music as experimental or adventurous. But I can sense some level of elitism in this neologism, trying to make the music output more exclusive or special. Of course, there must be some level of experimentation in *Mutate*, but my aim is to create a link between what is popular and what is experimental, making adventurous music accessible to everyone and, on the other hand, bringing pop or accessible elements to those who are into experimental music. The result is straight-up dance floor music devoid of any labels or fancy elitist terms.

Mutation and the ability to change is something crucial in any artistic field. What does mutation mean to you?

It took me a while to reach this 'mutating' approach. I got interested in electronic music from the 2010 s and I noticed two things; 1) the exoticisation of Arabic elements in music by Western media, press, audience and labels; 2) artists making fusion music, i.e., a bit of very common electronic music layered with kitschy vocal or Arabic music samples. The exoticism made me very self-conscious about using Arabic elements, because I didn't want my sound or identity as an Arab to be subject to exoticisation. As a reaction, I avoided Arabic influences, which isn't fair because I grew up in Egypt and, of course, I absorbed a lot of Arabic music, and it doesn't make sense to shy away from using its sonic elements in my music.

There's no way to completely escape exoticism, but there's still so much potential in Arabic music that I can reclaim from exotic narratives instead of my old knee-jerk response to Arabic influences in electronic music. Then I found the music of 3Phaz and TSVI and other examples from different regions, like 33EMYBW, Hyph11E and Bungalovv, using their cultural heritage or local music creatively. Their music is adventurous and not fusion oriented. I started to think about an alternative to fusion and then came the idea of mutation; while in fusion the used elements can be easily detected and separated, in mutation the output is a melted piece that cannot be broken down into its separate inputs; it's as if I add two components together and the result is a new product. Then the Arabic rhythms are mutating those club genres and maybe refreshing them, and vice versa.

And, last but not least, what are your dreams?

Just simple stuff, continuing to do what I like to do – making music, learning new things, eating nice food, reading, laughing.

Photo Omar Elkafrawy
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SHAPE+ Sound, Heterogeneous Art and Performance PLUS in Europe 2025

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SHAPE+ is a European platform for innovative music and audiovisual art, co-financed by the Creative Europe programme and Pro Helvetia.

This publication is an overview of the phase from 2022 to 2025, which began as a collaboration of 13 venues and festivals across Europe, expanding to 18 partners in 18 countries by its final year.
It features selected interviews from the project's weekly online series, artist testimonials, and a catalogue of participating festivals and acts.

SHAPE+ fosters exceptional emerging talent, connecting artists with local communities and audiences through collaborative residencies, commissioned artworks, performances and large artist meet-ups with a discourse programme.

A roster of artists has been created each year via a combination of an open call and curatorial selection. Across the annual artist roster, and the selection of local collaborators in each partner organisation's city, SHAPE+ has supported a total of 322 European acts.

SHAPE+ was built upon the previous SHAPE platform, which ran from 2015 to 2022 and supported 336 emerging European artists, presenting their work at festivals, events and venues in numerous countries across Europe and beyond. Taken together, SHAPE and SHAPE+ represent over a decade of continuous support for emerging artists.

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