

INTERFACE 2007 - festival for music and related arts  
40 Years of Speed and Space: Los Angeles - Berlin  
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The Interface Festival celebrates 40 years of the sister city partnership between Los Angeles and Berlin. Ballhaus Naunynstraße is a palace with a concert hall, garden, spiral staircase, gallery and cellar café, and a multi-use, musical, artistic social laboratory. Miniature in size but a giant in risk, the lively program of new, experimental, electronic and popular music as well as installations and films, art, theater, and intermedia transforms the Ballhaus into an exemplary world theater - with the best artists from around the corner and the best from around the world. Sound artists cast their acoustic spells on the Ballhaus, investigating the relationship between inside and outside, Los Angeles and Berlin.

Amidst the relentless Berlin music scene, this program stood out as worth dedicating your ears to. The unique line-up included Cluster, Werner Dafeldecker, Loss Glissandos/AMM, Trio Nexus, Scott Arford, John Wiese, Daedelus, David Toop, The September Collective and Harold Budd, and sound installations throughout the building.

"The most important and consistently underrated space-rock unit of the '70s, Cluster used everything from synthesizers to alarm clocks and kitchen utensils in their performances, recording many landmark LPs in the field of German space music often termed kosmische."

Legendary German space-rock duo Cluster opened the program with a standing-room only concert to an excited crowd packed into the Ballhaus theatre. Thrilling with the frisson of the groups first hometown performance after a legendary 12-hours-concert at the gallery "Hammer" (Europacenter) in 1969. The attention of these illustrious exponents of space age electronics was unwavering. Their gentle and sometimes fragile harmonies washed over the ears, bringing a sense of peace in a sparsely evolving musical landscape. The music floated in a singular dimension; with something charming and old school about watching these two venerable musicians interact with their equipment in an almost Zen-like stillness.

Bernard Gàl's "I am sHitting in a Room" in the lavatories of the Ballhaus pays homage to Alvin Lucier's classic "I am sitting in a room", in which the intrinsic resonances of a room are made audible through the repeated recording and projection of the same text. Microphones and loudspeakers are installed in both restrooms; the sounds from the women's room are projected into the men's room and vice versa, altering the room's audio dynamics and modulating the feedback that constantly arises. It was the piece most likely to be experienced by the audience outside the concert hall. I found the

constantly shifting pitches and swirling wash of looping and reflected sounds an intriguing and sometimes discomfiting accompaniment to each visit. The recording and playing back of these sonic spaces breaks up and questions the intimacy of this 'taboo soundscape'. I was unable to tell what exactly the sounds were created by, leaving an aura of mystery to the work.

I loved playing "Das Hip-O-Phon," an installation by Christopher Blenkinsop and Klaus Wagner with music by the 17 Hippias on a dilapidated wooden stairwell. This interactive sound sculpture created a fantastic series of low groaning strings, percussive and bell tones as you creaked up the stairs, setting off sounds in the 20 meter high organ pipes.

The second concert I attended was a noise night, featuring Scott Arford, John Wiese and Daedelus. Arford's Static Room used raw video signal to generate the audio, where the video is composed and created for its sound qualities as much as for its visual qualities. Tones and abstract color fields break down into vibrating sheets of interlaced flickering and shredding static, the abstract projections and resultant sounds make it possible to hear the buzzing images and see the flickering sounds. The work had a mesmerising quality, I found myself transfixed watching the abstract traces of the video signal as they created sonic textures alternating between white noise and a gentle hum.

John Wiese followed with a minimalist performance based entirely on live sounds created and sampled from a microphone inside his mouth. Using this visceral source material, he developed a richly textured and intricate sonic landscape, drawing me into a spacious and tonal composition. Afterwards came the wild psychedelic cruise showman Daedelus, resplendent in his white tuxedo, and bopping along to an incredibly diverse blend of up beat, even danceable, sounds. He described the music as "an hour long fugue concerning stylistically diverse regional genres, from the end of the Pacific Ocean; where the mountains crumble into the hungry sea." Playing on a wonderfully retro interface grid of buttons he created a carnivalesque atmosphere, using samba and bossa rhythms, 1930's film samples, breakbeats, electronics and a collection of instruments - clarinet, xylophone, flute, trumpet, acoustic guitar - to create colourful, eclectic dance parades.

I spent too little time in the company of revered pianist Harold Budd's gorgeously delicate ambient soundscapes, as he performed a brief solo. Werner Dafeldecker made beautiful use of Budd's playing as source to manipulate and reposition the sounds into a drifting spatial harmony.

David Toop and Werner Durand played a range of traditional and homemade instruments, including a flowerpot and bamboo flute. Their style blended into a subtly shifting sonic path of birdcalls, natural landscapes and ambient drones. The final night finished with The September Collective, who explained that their source material came from recordings of a church organ, and created an atmospheric and absorbing improvisation, where the music produced a trance-like synergy between performers and audience.

It was an ambitious, inventive and risk-taking program, with an eclectic assortment of styles, genres and performances in a sumptuous month of musical experiences. "Everything is percolating: the initiatives around Naunynstraße and the constant transformation of Berlin, the international networking of artists into more subtly differentiated genres and the simultaneous melting away of those differentiations." Thank you to the Ballhaus Naunynstraße for bringing LA to Berlin, and back again!

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