

# — comprovise ●





v. l. n. r.:  
 Caspar Johannes Walter,  
 Diego Montes,  
 Richard Barrett,  
 Jennifer Walshe,  
 Elisabeth Harnik,  
 Melvyn Poore,  
 Anton Lukoszevieze,  
 Frederic Rzewski,  
 Roger Turner,  
 Burkhard Stangl,  
 Lê Quan Ninh,  
 20.06.2009  
 (Foto: Martin Kurtenbach)



Umschlagabbildung: „This is why people o.d. on pills“ von Jennifer Walshe (Video-Partitur)  
 Foto: Martin Kurtenbach

## INHALT

TEILNEHMER	4
COMPROVISE	5
PODIUM I	6
PODIUM II	14
MP3-CD TITELLISTE	20
MP3-CD ROM	21
PODIUM III	26
RECOMPROVISE	34
FESTIVALPROGRAMM	37
IMPRESSUM	39

*Der Dokumentation ist eine MP3-CD ROM mit den Mitschnitten aller Konzerte des Festivals in der Mitte des Heftes beigelegt.*

ZAM - Zentrum für Aktuelle Musik präsentiert

# comprovisé

## 19./20.06.09

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**BJÖRN GOTTSTEIN** [DE] MUSIKWISSENSCHAFTLER, MUSIKJOURNALIST

**IN** der Veranstaltungslandschaft zeitgenössischer Musik gehen sie in der Regel getrennte Wege: Improvisation und Komposition. Festivals jedoch, die sich explizit darauf ausrichten, beide musikalische Formen in ebenbürtiger Balance zu präsentieren, sind dagegen eher rar. Hier setzte das Festival *comprovisé* an. An zwei Tagen ging es nicht nur um die Gleichgewichtung und unmittelbare Gegenüberstellung beider musikalischer Schaffensformen, sondern ebenso um deren Berührungspunkte, Überschneidungen, ihre Nähe und Distanz unter Berücksichtigung musikästhetischer, performativer sowie kulturpolitisch-soziologischer Aspekte. In abwechslungsreicher Ausgewogenheit waren in vier Konzerten acht Kompositionen und acht Duo- bis Quartett-Improvisationen sowie eine von Richard Barrett vorbereitete „Komprovisation“ zu hören.

Entsprechend der thematischen Ausrichtung waren insbesondere Musikerinnen und Musiker eingeladen worden, die aufgrund ihrer individuellen künstlerischen Biografie und Arbeitsweise auf einer oder mehreren Ebenen mit dem Thema in Bezug stehen: Musiker, die z.B. zugleich Komponist und Improvisator, Interpret und Improvisator, Interpret und Komponist oder Interpret, Komponist und Improvisator sind. Des Weiteren zählten reine Improvisatoren, Komponisten und Interpreten zu den Gästen. Zur Vertiefung der Thematik ergänzten Podiumsrunden und publikumsoffene Diskussionen das Festivalprogramm, welche dazu aufforderten, sich mit der Geschichte, Ästhetik und Rezeption von Improvisation und Komposition auch auf theoretischer Ebene auseinanderzusetzen.

Diese Dokumentation gibt Interessierten die Möglichkeit, das Festival *comprovisé* in Wort und Ton nachzuerleben. Auf den folgenden Seiten sind Transkriptionen der drei Podiumsdiskussionen in großzügig gefassten Auszügen wiedergegeben. Sie wurden mit Blick auf den dokumentarischen Charakter absichtlich in der Festivalsprache Englisch übernommen. Björn Gottstein, der die Podiumsrunden des Festival moderiert hatte, komplettiert diese Textdokumentation mit einem Nachwort. Die dieser Broschüre beigelegte CD-ROM dokumentiert in Form von mp3-Dateien sämtliche siebzehn Konzertbeiträge und ermöglicht, dem musikalischen Verlauf der zwei Festivalabende im Nachhinein zu folgen.

# comprovisé

## PODIUM 1

### [Z/S]eitensprünge

#### Nähe und Ferne

#### improvisierter und komponierter Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart

<b>RB</b>	<i>Richard Barrett</i>
<b>MP</b>	<i>Melvyn Poore</i>
<b>FR</b>	<i>Frederic Rzewski</i>
<b>RT</b>	<i>Roger Turner</i>
<b>CJW</b>	<i>Caspar Johannes Walter</i>
<b>BG</b>	<i>Björn Gottstein</i>
<b>A</b>	<i>Audience</i>

BG: When I once talked to Keith Rowe about the founding of AMM he said, that the idea behind it was that they wanted to invent a new music. The idea they had in mind was, that musics had been invented like for example the opera was thought up 400 years ago. He also acknowledged the fact, that in retrospect the idea of being able to sit down and just invent a music is arrogant and at the same time naïve. Frederic, did you have the same idea of inventing music when you started the MEV [Musica Elettronica Viva] in Rome in the '60s?

FR: The same idea as Keith Rowe? – No!

BG: A similar idea maybe? Or what was the idea? Why did you turn you away from being a concert pianist and a composer and start to work with everyday objects and electronics?

FR: Well, I've thought about this question and I come to the conclusion, that I make decisions in my life for no reason at all and then I invent reasons later on.

BG: So, the reasons you invented later on you have discarded, because they were not causes for what you did.

FR: No, clearly not, they are lies.

BG: Could you tell me some of these lies?

FR: I would rather not go into these questions, because they are too intimate.

BG: Nonetheless I do have to ask about MEV as being a sort of revolutionary ensemble at its time...

FR: Well, it was never revolutionary.

BG: But it wasn't exactly traditional either.

FR: Yes, it was; I would say so, very

traditional, deeply rooted in the classical tradition.

BG: Did you feel this way at the time when you founded the ensemble?

FR: Yes. I think we were very consciously trying to follow the example of John Cage and David Tudor for example, whom we considered classical masters.

BG: Maybe it's not revolutionary from the aesthetic point of view, but there is a social-political impact in this form of music making, trying to abolish hierarchies. Did you at least feel that it was a political revolutionary project, that you were taking part in?

FR: What do you mean by hierarchies?

BG: Hierarchies are for example, that the composer hands a score to the musician and says: „play this!"; there is an imperative in the score, which would not be found in the free improvisation.

FR: Well, I don't see what that has to do with hierarchies. When an architect makes a design for a building is that a hierarchy? No, you need a design to make a building, otherwise the building would fall down.

BG: OK, but you found a way of music making, without the design and the building did not fall down.

FR: This is not true either. We had plenty of designs. When we first started we attempted to make electronic music in real time, but we were performing compositions. We did John Cage's *Imaginary Landscape n.5*, for example, for a non specified number of turntables, and we did a number of other compositions of that kind. We were not involved with improvisation at all, nor was John Cage although he actually was, he didn't realize it. We got into improvisation somewhat later under the influence of some jazz musicians, who were coming through Rome at that time; but that was a later stage, so, actually improvisation had very little to do with it in the beginning. We were trying to make electronic music with simple means, without having to deal with studios and things like that.

BG: At the same time, I would say that from the point of the musical experiment, there was a certain openness to the form you were working with or, there was an experimental approach to what you were doing. There is

a sort of definition of experimental music by John Cage: „music the outcome of which is open“; and when you read Ornette Coleman's definition of „free jazz“ it's: „music, of which you don't know how it is gonna sound like when you start to play“. So, there is an improvisational aspect in the experimental music.

FR: Yes, of course.

BG: You say you were not improvising, but at the same time there was a certain freedom you were taking, that you were not taking as a concert pianist or as a composer.

FR: I don't know if freedom has anything to do with it.

BG: Would you have a different term for what it has to do with?

FR: I think these things tend to be exaggerated. There are of course differences, but I think that too much is made of these duality's. Actually, in real life we are dealing with both of these things all the time: when you cross the street in crowded traffic you have to know what you are doing, you have to have some kind of plan and you have to be able to execute it and you have to be able to move your body in a coherent way, otherwise you get hit by a truck. At the same time, you have to be able to jump out of the way if a truck actually comes your way; I suppose that is an example of improvisation. So, both of these things are necessary and they need each other in order to function properly. So, that duality disappears, doesn't it, in a kind of fog, some kind of intellectual german fog, a Gaelian fog, in which all cows are grey. [laughs]

BG: Roger, when you started playing in the '70s did you have the feeling that the paradigm of free improvised music had already been formed out? That you were entering a sphere that had already been defined, that had a certain vocabulary, a certain style?

RT: I think some musicians want to establish a style and others want to have an approach to making music. And I think, that you work at vocabularies and you work at your instrument and you expand your interests, whatever they are. I mean, there were approaches that were established but there is an enormous amount of space of course, because in the end you are working with yourself and your interests,

with your instrument and music and your life as you find it...

BG: This personal approach is true for every musician; at the same time, there is a sort of intersubjectivity to making music with other people and a certain agreement – that might not be outspoken – when you start making music together. I would think, that when you get together with other musicians there is an agreement.

RT: What kind of agreement do you think of?

BG: There is an agreement about the aesthetic horizon, which you work with. There is a certain idea of taboos, which may be part of this agreement – having no taboos may also be a part of this agreement –, but there is a „language“, a vocabulary that has been built up over several years; there is a certain idea of how the music is gonna sound like.

RT: I just think, that really depends on who you are talking about...

BG: I'm talking about you.

RT: I found a lot to work at, of which some had been touched on, some hadn't; I think that's just true all the way through. I don't think it's the making of products.

BG: I'm not talking about products either. I'm talking about a paradigm, in which music takes place and it's, of course, OK for the musician to say: „well, I don't care about the paradigm, I'm interested in what I do and if it fits within a paradigm is not my problem“. Yet, at the same time, this paradigm has been formed, it's there, it's a historic fact; so, we can describe it and separate it from other aesthetic paradigms. So, I'm a little bit curious...

RT: If you want to talk about London: there was John Stevens, who set up a social situation based very much on co-operation and something to do with bouncing the same ball; and then you would have people like Derek Bailey, who would totally oppose to that; and about concepts of group improvisation, what a group constituted consequently. You had people, who dealt more in volumes, some who dealt in detail, you had all kinds of stuff like that. So, you entered into that world and you moved around and found your positionings.

A [Tiziana Bertoncini]: Did you play rhythms in the '70s?

RT: Sure, of course, I still play rhythms.

A [TB]: But, as a drummer, a „normal“ drummer, you are educated to play rhythms; and I think in that historical period in the free improvisation you just went out of this cliché that a drummer has to play rhythms.

RT: I played lots of rhythms; I mean there is all kinds of rhythmic stuff that went on and goes on. I don't think the avoidance of rhythm was a purpose necessarily. What you did with it and how you got out of situations was equally interesting. There are recordings from the early '70s of the London musicians' collective, where you can hear rhythm and in fact, a kind of metric time being played by musicians.

BG: I think, the problem is, that I asked for similarities and you answer with differences. That's perfectly fine, but it's obviously two ways of looking at it: you look at it maybe from the inside, I look at it from the outside and – being the structuralist, musicologist, that I am – I am looking for similarities. Richard, being a composer and improviser you must at one point in your life have made the decision that both is important for you.



links: Richard Barrett,  
rechts: Roger Turner  
(Foto: Martin Kurtenbach)

Your composed music is quite different from your improvised music, I would say. Why is it important to you to keep both traditions?

RB: First of all, the subtext behind a lot

of what's being said so far and a lot of what generally gets said when the words composition and improvisation are used in the same kind of context, is that these are in some ways comparable, but different objects, like one is an apple and the other one is an orange: they are both fruits but apart from that they are rather different from one another. Having thought about this over a fairly long period, I have come to a provisional conclusion that that's not necessarily the most helpful way to see it. And when Frederic mentioned what's involved in crossing the road, I think, that comes close to the kind of way that I would think about these issues. So for me the situation calls for a redefinition of what we mean by these words and the relation between them. And the way I've gradually come to understand the situation – I don't mean understand it in the sense that now I have sorted it out and everything is cut and dry as far as I am concerned, but understand it as an aspect of my own activity as a musician primarily – is that I would refer to composition as the imaginative act of creating music, and I would regard improvisation as one way of doing that, and there are many other ways as well. I think, it's impossible really in the end to separate out these ideas as if they belonged to different grounds and that's something, which is kind of given to us by the fact that very often the contexts in which the music is played are different, for example the audience is different; but quite often the people involved might be the same people. Since I came to this idea of improvisation – again, I shouldn't claim to have come to it alone – as a method of composition and composition as something, which embraces much more than just writing black dots on pieces of paper, something that convinces me, that that was a good point to reach is, that since coming to that conclusion, I feel that it has been a liberating factor in what I am doing, where the dividing lines between different types of musical activity are not drawn as strictly as I might have thought they were. Taking a wider view of that I would say, that one interesting thing, which characterizes developments in music in the 20th century, was that gradually any sound



which is possible to hear, at a certain point became allowable as a sound, which could be a musical sound. That's a development we associate with the name of John Cage, but I would also include things like the tradition of the *musique concrète*, for example, where sounds which were not originally intended as musical, put into a musical context by the way they are listened to, become musical sounds. That search outwards for new musical resources has effectively reached the point, where there's no sound I can make here on the stage, which I can't claim to be a musical sound. In general we can say, that any sound can be regarded as a musical sound, depending on the context.

So, where does the search outward continue? I think, one way in which it does continue is in a search for means of expression through form and structure and that is where improvisation as a method of composition becomes more important: and also methods of composition, which combine people, for example, collaborative compositions. What's interesting to me at the moment is the possibility of thinking of composition in as many different ways as possible, exploring the ways in which one can work together with other musicians in order to expand our perception of form and expression.

RT: But everything has form.

RB: That is true and actually, a lot of the form which is put there, is put there by us listening: if we hear something, which is random, which has been generated by some random means we are going to put some kinds of form to it, because that's the kind of pattern recognition creatures we are. But what I'm talking about is the creation of form, exploring the possibilities of form, which is what we are doing when we are making music, whether we are writing it on paper or playing it in an improvisational way. For me as a composer, improvisation becomes a more and more central way of interacting with other musicians to generate musical experience.

BG: If I understand you correctly improvisation is for you then just another form of composition.

RB: Well, not *just* another form: one of the problems is, that when we talk about music

making, which combines spontaneous creation and reactions with pre-composed, premeditated products of the imagination then, the closer you look at that, the more difficult it is to sort out which belongs to which. For example, I remember some years ago the pianist Cecil Taylor was doing a tour of the UK and I went to two of the solo concerts, that he gave. Cecil Taylor's music, of course, is freely improvised, but on the other hand, what he played on these two different evenings was extremely similar in a lot of ways, a lot of structural ways in particular. At that time, I thought he was attempting to fool us into thinking that this was all freely improvised, while in fact, obviously, he had been thinking very clearly – both, before and during the performance – of how the structure of that piece would go. At that time, I thought if we're going to improvise we should really take the approach of attempting starting from the blank slate, whenever we start to play, of knowing nothing and of starting from nothing. Experience showed me, that that's not actually possible: there is always an interaction between spontaneous and premeditated thinking in any kind of music making.



Björn Gottstein  
(Foto: Martin Kurtenbach)

AL: Is it not a simple way to say, that improvisation is „composition in real time“?

RB: I think it's a too simple way of putting it, because not all improvisation takes place in real time: when we sit down and play later on it's not going to be just playing

Frederic Rzewski  
(Foto: Luis Neuenhofer)



the first thing, that comes into our heads, there's always something more complicated going on. Yes, that's certainly one aspect of it, but I don't feel that's the whole story.

FR: There is some grumbling going on over here: in regard to your remark, that Cecil Taylor's music had structure and therefore he must have been thinking about it; we concur, that this does not follow logically: it might have had structure, but it doesn't prove, that he was thinking about it.

RB: Well, I wasn't intending to make such a simplistic comparison. Let me put it like this: I believe, that Cecil Taylor thinks about what he's going to play before he plays it. I'm maybe wrong about that, but that's what I believe.

FR: I don't think so.

BG: I want to ask Johannes: being the only person on the panel, who is not involved in improvised music, how important the idea of improvising is to you as a player and more importantly to you as a composer?

JCW: I would say that the brain – because you discussed about what the improviser plans before playing – is not only for thinking; it has many options, like the musicians do some things without really making a plan and thinking, but still something is active. I am more or less a composer, first I developed as a composer and then I started to perform, which had more a kind of social idea, because as a composer you are alone, you have your music, you invent things, you make plans, you close the borders. In German we have that very nice word *Werk* (I don't know how it's in English, like *master-masterpiece*), so we have a little bit the tendency to really make too much plans. There are many things to discover and do and to want, and I like to have possibilities to express myself or to see somebody expressing himself not only in one specific way, but crossing borders, being inventive. You see a composition and some things are thought, some things are felt, some things are invented and some things are a little bit free, sometimes the interpreters have some kind of possibility to also create in the piece a kind of personal expression. I don't see so much the differences, but it's good to do several things. For me, it is really important

that I compose, that I play, but also that I make sounds without planning.

BG: But you do that when you compose: do you improvise or search sounds on your cello?

CJW: For composing I don't need it, but for my personality maybe I do need it.

BG: Your piece, which is going to be performed tomorrow night, *durchscheinende Etüden*, was created by a method, which has very little to do with improvising, as far as I remember: you used mistakes appearing by the copying...

CJW: Yes, kind of mistakes...

BG: It's not formalistic, but it's at least far away from the notion of just letting the sound develop in your head and then writing it down; it has much more to do with a certain concept. How far the concept is important in the realm of your work?

CJW: It's a difficult question. I would say there is a kind of tension between some structural ideas of the piece, which are not too much fixed, but they are there. I saw some graphical things [the mistakes of the copies] and I wanted to translate them into specific pitches or something like that; but there was a sort of need to make really many sounds in this difficult situation. But it's foolish to wonder if a composer is improvising a sound in the head. On the other hand, I know, that sometimes in arabic countries they call something an improvisation, what actually is notated: it's just a style of playing.

BG: I can put the question the other way around: would you say, that improvising musicians can do something, that you as a composer cannot do?

CJW: I don't see so strongly the difference. For myself, composing is not the centre, rather music or maybe a kind of artistic intention, which can even be visual. It's interesting, that for example in the paintings you can tell something about time. So for me it's not a contradiction. It's a world, it's a field.

BG: Melvyn, I guess you have a different approach to the whole prospect, because you started your training as a classical musician and at some point you must have decided, that that way of playing the tuba was not satisfying.

MP: OK, I have to correct one mistake: I had learned to play the tuba, but I have not studied the tuba, I studied music, I'm a musicologist, like you, from training. At some point I decided, that I would prefer to be on stage: the tuba is the only instrument that I ever learned to play – actually, some people tried to teach me something about the piano, but they never succeeded, so I stopped with that. So, the tuba was the centre of my musical activity and since I felt that I needed to become a performer, that meant that I had to do it with the tuba. It was kind of, you know, it was a *Verantwortung*, a responsibility which just came to me out of the blue as it were, but I took it on and I found ways to deal with that. And one of those ways was improvising. The most important person in my life up to that point had been my art teacher at school. She was a very open and honest person and she took me under her wing and told me a lot of things about 20th century visual art. And that was very useful to me. When I left school then, I started to explore music outside of the traditional one, that I knew up to that point. So with that background I had ideas, I had concepts in my head, which I had got from her, which I was able to translate into some kind of music. And I did a lot of that through improvising, just trying things out basically.

BG: At the same time you are now a regular performer, you are a tuba player in an ensemble, you play scores, like every other musician does: so, there are two parts in your life as a musician. How important was then the improvising aspect or is the improvising aspect the dominant one of your playing?

MP: The important thing for me as a tuba player was to gather as much experience as I could as a player, from whatever situation came in my way. I was always open to jump into every kind of situation and I enjoyed probably 90% of the work, that I've ever done in my career, which is a good high percentage. Another aspect of playing the tuba for me was being able to extend the tuba and to come into contact with other musicians – or with other instrumentalists – and the sound world that I produced through the sound world, that I was developing

myself. That was one big reason to take the tuba apart and put it together in different ways, trying different mouth pieces on it, using different mutes and all the other techniques, and then to get into electronics and so on. Basically, I can quite honestly say, that I've been working on extending the sound world of my instrument now for fifty-one years and I'm still doing it and it's still just as much fun doing it as it was then, at the beginning.

BG: The way you extended the technique of the instrument is a way of experimenting and it's an open process, it's an improvisatoric process. I would say, that the *raison d'être* of your playing has an improvisational background. At the moment, when somebody does not use the extended techniques of the tuba do you not feel that the instrument is reduced to something that you have liberated it from?

MP: Well, there you touch on a point which is actually quite important to me as well and that is: respect for tradition. I had never felt that I needed to completely separate myself from the classical music tradition. I was brought up in a classical world – a classical thinking, not just classical music – and I still maintain a certain respect for that. I think, that progress should not move too fast because one has to have time to digest what is happening. To digest each step as you go and to understand that for yourself, for your own personal psychology and for the social aspects as well, on a broader level.



v. l. n. r. :  
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 Richard Barrett,  
 Caspar Johannes Walter*  
 (Fotos: Marion Wörle)



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# comprovisé

## PODIUM 2

### [Anti]Materie

#### Musikästhetische und performative Aspekte

<b>EH</b>	<i>Elisabeth Harnik</i>
<b>AL</b>	<i>Anton Lukoszevziez</i>
<b>LQN</b>	<i>Lê Quan Ninh</i>
<b>BS</b>	<i>Burkhard Stangl</i>
<b>JW</b>	<i>Jennifer Walshe</i>
<b>BG</b>	<i>Björn Gottstein</i>
<b>A</b>	<i>Audience</i>

BG: I would like to pick up a thread where we left out yesterday, this means you didn't need to be here yesterday to understand what we are talking about, but, at least for me, quite a few questions remained unanswered. I'd like to pick up the point, where several people had a notion, that it's not really interesting to differentiate between the two spheres of improvised and composed music and Anton, being there a member of the audience, said it could be dealt by just with saying, that improvising is composing in real time. At the same time, I feel that that is only part of what improvising is doing, because when you improvise you don't necessarily want to compose. There are certain elements of the activity of music making in improvising, which guide away from the realm of composition. So, the question would be to you Anton first: don't you think, that „real time composition“ is maybe too shortly termed to really label what improvising is?

AL: Basically, I opened my mouth and said what was in my head, so it was only a short sort of observation, but simply what I meant was that improvisation happens in a „now“ like here, in the space, and composition happens elsewhere; so, that's the distinction I was just trying to make and I think it's reasonably valid, but there are always other distinctions to be made...

BG: OK, yes there are other distinctions to be made. For me the question really is why do you choose – and maybe I can ask this to somebody who composes as well as improvises, maybe to Elisabeth: why do you choose the form of composition or composing something, for a certain idea you

have in your head and why do you choose the path of improvisation? What is the decisive moment for you?

EH: I love both. For me what is interesting is the time dimension: time has a lot of dimensions and when improvising I like focusing on the moment and making decisions in the moment. Also, for me it's interesting how change happens, in particular inside a collective. When I'm composing, it's just me. What I'm interested in when I'm improvising is to create music together with other musicians. In composition I use strategies, where for example I can go back in the time, I can change the beginning etc. It gives me a kind of freedom, which I don't have in improvisation, but there I have it in the moment. So, I would say it's just another dimension I am focussing on, but time is time anyway... it's here. I think, you can't compose without being also able to improvise or to be spontaneous and, on the other hand, you can't improvise without having somehow some kind of strategies or rules. I don't believe in purism. I think the two practices are quite related to each other. You can focus more on one side or on the other, and, to be honest, everything has more than two sides.

BG: OK. You said time is time anyway; this is true to certain extend, I guess. What I wonder is: for a composer it's quite clear, that when he structures a piece he has the possibility of forming certain moments within the piece and he can attempt to create something, what we call „the magical moment“, or let it be a structural high point, a climax, something of this sort. Ninh, when you improvise do you attempt to find points, that you would consider to be „magical moments“? Do you have the idea, when you start an improvisation you're doing something to prepare other moments, other moments that are in your head, that are coming up, or is it just a free flowing situation decided from second to second?

LQN: It's more from second to second. The experience of improvisation is just about adapting yourself to the circumstances, which are here and now, for example the size of the room, the people you are with, how the instrument sounds, etc. It's also, of course, how the energy, the presence of everybody is flowing in the room or not. It's just an

Melvyn Poore  
(Foto: Martin Kurtenbach)



oscillation between the circumstances you are in and the ones you create, and at some point, there is no difference. So, maybe the difference between improvising and composing is, that to compose is to create certain circumstances and to improvise is just to adapt yourself to the circumstances. In a way to improvise has, for me, something of „resignation“: you have to accept everything. Maybe it's a weakness, you know? I don't know...

BG: That has also an aspect of courage, you know, accepting the things...

LQN: Yes, maybe, I don't know...: you are obliged to accept the circumstances and sometimes the circumstances are very difficult: sometimes you are invited to play with people who really want to show off, or something like that; so, then the music gets stuck. But I like also these kind of circumstances, because you have anyway to face yourself. So, how can I try to be a part of this, despite these difficult circumstances? It's a part of the job.

BG: OK, considering that Ninh and Elisabeth already mentioned the idea of the collective: Burkhard, for you, is music making also something of a social practice, is it about the collective, about working with other people?

BS: Yes, I'm sure, making music is a social interaction. Maybe we lost the tradition to sing and to play together at home, we have no songs (maybe Bob Dylan songs?); so, for me it's very nice to play with people. You know, we don't have the opportunity [to do it] that much often. This is maybe one reason why we like to do it, even if we have to accept horrible circumstances. Concerning the question composition/improvisation, I would say, that composition is really connected with writing. Our cultural connections to writing are very strong: we are living in a literal world. Composition from the technical point of view is completely different from an improvisation: maybe I can compare it on one side to literature and, on the other, to rhetoric. The results can be sometimes similar from the aesthetic point of view, but the process of creation is completely different.

BG: Yes, it is, and at the same time there are, of course, areas of the *in between*: there is a tradition of musical graphics, which is just an optical inspiration or source for the musicians

to sight improvising to certain extend; or the idea of a concept, just writing down two sentences of instructions for the musicians. This is kind of an *in between* sphere. I can maybe ask you, Jennifer, since you do both and write to different extents: we heard two performances of yours yesterday: the solo performance is, as far as I know, more or less a fixed composition and the improvisation with Burkhard was a free improvisation. Is it a different degree of freedom, liberation? Why is it important for you to have both aspects in your work?

JW: It's very important for me, because I think that you access different energies. You can go to a performance of Mahler's 2nd symphony and you can see the orchestra playing really well and you feel a very specific type of energy from the performers. But if you see a really fantastic improvisation performance, there is a different type of energy, just a different quality. I like to write pieces that are freer in the notation: if you look at the score of the second piece I performed last night, the score is just a basic structure. When I write such pieces, which allow for improvisation I prefer either, that they're written for people that I know and I can trust, like the piece, that Anton will play later on tonight...

AL: Do you trust me?

JW: Not with children or money... but I trust Anton and so I can write a text score and I know he will understand what I'm talking about, because this tradition of writing texts scores, to me it's very open and it leaves a lot of room for really terrible improvisations. I'm more interested in trying to push people into situations, where they think about sound in a different way and, because there are energies pushed into thinking about sound in one specific way, you free up some other parts of their energies, so you don't have to have them reading notation, so that they are trying to access a certain type of energy instead.

BG: OK, but now you didn't say anything about your performing completely freely...

JW: I view improvisation as a practice, in the same way that I view meditation: it's something that you do, you try to have no mind – this Buddhist concept –, but you are also trying to be mindful and just in the



moment at the same time. So, with improvisation that's sort of different, it's a different type of energy than composing, where you're sitting there, thinking. Samuel Beckett talks about how when he wrote a play he would try to be three different people: once, he would be the actor on the stage saying the words, then, he would be the audience member watching the play, and he would also be the writer, writing the play. I feel very much, when you're a composer you are those three things, and being the performer, making the music, is often where improvising comes into the compositional process. When you're improvising you're just trying to listen and trying not to think, so that you're not thinking: „oh, we should all build to this climax“, you're just trying to switch off your mind, so that you're just listening and reacting to what people are doing.

AL: If I'm playing a composition, a notated piece, on the cello, it's about my relationship with the notation and the score and I want to fulfill what the person has written. But if I'm improvising it's a relationship with my instrument, much more I'd say. I mean, obviously I have a relationship with my instrument in order to play the notated piece, but it's much more about me and my instrument together and listening as well, of course.

BG: Ninh has also mentioned the others and the situation you are in, it's not only about yourself: I mean, it's really a crucial point, that compositions are often about something and improvisations are often not about something. Ninh has said that he doesn't think in terms of form. I'm trying to imagine how you play without thinking: I mean, of course you're informed by the history of yourself, you don't invent music anew every time you start playing; there is a certain degree of experience, expectation. All these things must play a role, when you play, so the idea of not thinking seems kind of mythological for me...

A [Thomas Lehn]: For me, when I'm improvising it's more a complex thing: I can't say that I'm not thinking. Imagine you have a mixing desk with four channels: intellect, intuition, emotion, *physis*; then, at different times, these channels are on different higher or lower levels. When I'm improvising

I can't say for sure that I'm not composing. Composition is, that you consciously put sounds together with a sort of architectural plan. So, in that moment when you're in a musical process, then you anyway have, in that point of time, an awareness about the material, but also about what you've done just a minute before. In relationship to this, I'm responsible for what I'm doing right now, in this „here and now“ moment. For me it's „here and now“, but at the same time there is also the awareness about the past and the vision about the future. I'm „here and now“, but in a complex structure.

RB: The question of not thinking, should not be misunderstood: the parallel with meditation is particularly important, because, in order to be able to let go the conscious thought in meditation, it requires training and preparation and, in order to be able to play improvised music without thinking also involves training and preparation. It's not something which you can just sit down and do. The preparation involved is maybe not conscious in the way of the preparation for the performance of a notated composition, which involves writing notes on paper. It reminds me of something that the trombonist George Lewis once said to the audience before starting to play in a performance: he was explaining somehow the fact, that the music was gonna be freely improvised: „you think I'm making this all up as we go along, but actually it's taking me my whole life to get to this point, the point of which this music starts“ and I think, that that dimension of time is also very important in improvisation; the fact, that every experience we have – maybe not consciously – feeds into what you do, feeds into your prediction of what might happen next in your relationship to past and present during the performance.

BS: Maybe we can compare some kind of improvisation to the feeling of improvisation the French writers had in the '20s, experimenting with *écriture automatique* to get in contact with the unconscious. But you have to prepare for it, you have to work on it, and I say: improvisation is preparation. Before coming to Cologne, I had to decide, which guitar I take, which electronics I take, what my instrument is, what tuning I use... – I like to build my little beautiful „jail“ to be able to

escape during the concert not to fall in clichés. But to get this kind of meditation thing, which you mentioned, it's for sure necessary to prepare yourself all the time. It's impossible without it.

JW: I know it sounds like new age 1970's, when I say this, but I think in a way it's like a ritual, it's like going into trance. Maybe part of the reason why I love improvising so much is because I'm a composer and I spend a lot of time in a room on my own, thinking extremely precisely what people are going to do. [When you improvise with other musicians] it's almost like you are in the mind of the other people, you share a certain intimacy, that's physical and tactile, and it's very strange how you know people you've improvised with: you know them in a certain way, that five years of talking to them and having coffee would not...

A [TL]: I just would like to extend, what you were saying about trance and the sensation of being played: when I'm working on to interpret a written piece the wonderful goal is to come to the same point, that you are actually in the flow and in touch with the given moment – like Ninh was saying before. When you are playing as an interpreter, it doesn't matter so much what you are playing – it matters a bit – but for me, there is this point when you are in an integral touch with the entire thing. But I always feel that you can't force this kind of state. But when it happens, for me it's very similar with the same sensation I have when I'm satisfyingly improvising. For example yesterday, I could clearly sense when the Thürmchen Ensemble was playing Carola Bauckholt's piece [*Klarinettrio*]: that felt very free to me in the way how they executed the piece; and indeed not with this too much „execution attitude“, which you often find in new music...

BG: Which is the piece they probably played two hundred times. At the same time that piece made clear to me how big the difference and the gap between improvised and composed music actually is, because I've always been assuming two things: that it would be easy to move from one to the other and move the boundary as far as you want, but I'm quite certain now, that you cannot do that. The other thing is, that – we've been

talking about moments of meditation etc. – it is a very physical and spiritual experience that people have described, when they improvise. At the same time, the physicality of a composed piece or even, as I mentioned before, constructing the „magic moment“, is really a benefit of composed music, that improvised music doesn't easily give to. It's maybe a benefit, that has not been mentioned enough.

MP: I've a problem with your idea of constructing the „magic moment“, because – in my experience – they are never constructed, they are just there...

BG: Even in composed music?

MP: ...they are simply there and you only have to let them shine through.

BG: Who has to let them shine through, the composer or the interpreter?

MP: I'm talking about the performance situation, on stage, playing alone or with other people, and those „magic moments“ are simply there. It's about non-interference.

LQN: Yes, and I would like to say, that there is one level, which is pretty close to what Jennifer was talking about: we need to remember, that music is made by sound and silences, and sounds are vibrations of the air. It doesn't matter if the music is written or not: if people have a deep relationship with vibration, the „magic moment“ appears, because it's about vibrating and making the air vibrating in a certain way. Maybe – I don't know if it's exactly that, maybe I want to dream about it – these vibrations make vibrating the bodies and the minds of everybody in the room, and the „magic moment“ appears. It's happening absolutely on a primitive level, even if the music has been written by a genius, at some point it's very primitive. There are many musicians who don't have this relation, they have an abstract relation, and I'm talking about a very concrete relation to the sound and also to the silence, which is almost the same at some point. If you loose this contact, well, then it is not very interesting from my point of view; I mean, I'm not touched at all.

BS: You know, you might play a concert and it is absolutely not magic, and then you hear the recording and it's magic.

LQN: Yes, it's because the recording is magic, but not the concert.

BS: That's why I mistrust feelings, because it happened so often: „No, it is real shit, it didn't work with the colleagues...” and then you listen to what you did and it sounds really good! Maybe this so-called „magic moment” appears by listening to the recording and that's a problem now: we cannot trust what we are doing during the performance.

JW: I know what you mean, where you think „oh God! I sounded like ass” and you listen to the recording and you go: „Ah! That sounds really good!”, but I think that's part of the filters, you know, and Thomas was talking about having these different filters...

BS: The so-called Thomas Lehn filters...

JW: Yeah, the Thomas Lehn's „Gefühlungsmischpult für Improvisation”; I think this is part of these filters kicking in, where you start thinking and you are judging and you're not just focused. There is a psychologist, who talks about this concept of flow: he says that if somebody is climbing a mountain, or cooking, or making music, and they're in this state called „flow”, they don't notice that time pass by. Flow is usually associated with no financial gain, which ironically is most of the free improvisers' lives. When you are in a moment of flow, you are not thinking: „I'm really great” or „I'm getting paid for this”; it's just you're in that moment. He wrote a book, where he talks about the concept of flow and how this is crucial to people's well being. I have friends, who – if they don't cook regularly – they go nuts, because they get this sense of flow from cooking. One of the places where I get this, is from improvising. But when you're in this flow you're not judging, you're not thinking about: „what's happening after the gig?”. I think, that sometimes you can be in that moment of flow on some level and on another level you are judging what you are doing or you don't feel the energy from the audience. Then you have these situations, when you listen to the recording and it sounds different to how you remembered the experience.

AL: There is an interview with Willem de Kooning, the painter, and he says, that when he is in the act of painting, he is glimpsing. He says: „I'm a glimpsing glimpser”. When you are playing, there is no before, there is no after, you are in the moment. With improvisation,

at least for me, the memory thing is totally different from a composition; as we have rehearsed and practiced the composition, you know what's gonna happen.

BG: Nonetheless, for me as a listener and as somebody who is very dependent on historical facts, so, for my mere existence and self-confidence, why is there a certain sound that is formed at a certain moment? You have the term non-idiomatic improvisation and at the same time, there is an idiom. So, you can be as free as you want, as open spiritually as you want, but nonetheless the possibilities you have as a musician at that very moment seem to me to be limited. I don't know if you would disagree with this.

AL: Well, we all play instruments or we use our voices...

BG: That's not the only limitation; it's, of course, one limitation: I mean, when Frederic and Roger yesterday kind of refused to play their instruments, that was also a way of choosing a possibility which was not really on the list...

LQN: You know, at some point when you have a long relationship with the instrument, at some point it's in your belly, so you can do anything and even not playing it; you just sit down and it's a part of the improvisation, because it's not about making an object here and now – it's obviously here and now – but it's also a part of a lifetime process, so it doesn't stop. You can give up, and just being there it's enough, because you are in the relationship with the vibrations here and now.

RB: I believe, that one of the things we do subconsciously when we're improvising is making prediction about all possible ways that the music could go on from this moment and acting to a certain extend on a kind of prediction. But that prediction is constantly being revised in the line of what actually happens. What I find interesting about that, is that that puts the improvising performer in exactly the same position, in this regard, to somebody sitting in the audience listening either to improvised music or to any other kind of music listened to for the first time, whether it's composed or improvised. So, in that sense, one of the interesting things, which commits me to improvisation is the fact, that it really is an extension of listening.

## MP3-CD TITELLISTE

- 01 FREDERIC RZEWSKI, ROGER TURNER 16:06
- 02 JENNIFER WALSHE, BURKHARD STANGL 9:02
- 03 MELVYN POORE: *Donne That* (2009) 10:09
- 04 ANTON LUKOSZEVIEZE, ELISABETH HARNIK, LÊ QUAN NINH 11:51
- 05 THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE Carola Bauckholt: *Klarinettentrio* (1993) 9:32
- 06 MELVYN POORE, RICHARD BARRETT, ELISABETH HARNIK 10:32
- 07 JENNIFER WALSHE *The Dowager Marchylove's The Wasistas of Thereswhere* 5:46
- 08 THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE Christian Pfeiffer: *aphel aber* (2008) 3:31
- 09 THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE Elisabeth Harnik: *šum* (2004) 9:46
- 10 RICHARD BARRETT, LÊ QUAN NINH 14:31
- 11 FREDERIC RZEWSKI: *Nanosonatas, Book 5* (2008) 16:41
- 12 BURKHARD STANGL, ANTON LUKOSZEVIEZE, ROGER TURNER 13:07
- 13 ANTON LUKOSZEVIEZE Jennifer Walshe: *This is why people o.d. on pills* (2004) 10:02
- 14 MELVYN POORE, BURKHARD STANGL, FREDERIC RZEWSKI, LÊ QUAN NINH 10:56
- 15 THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE Caspar Johannes Walter: *durchscheinende Etüde IV/d* (1992/93) 8:56
- 16 JENNIFER WALSHE, RICHARD BARRETT, ELISABETH HARNIK, ROGER TURNER 12:30
- 17 TUTTI „KOMPROVISATION“ von Richard Barrett: *Codex X* 11:24



**comprovise**

BG: For the avant-garde music, „the new“ and the advancement were very important notions. Before this festival I've been asked, if I could describe the historical development of improvisation from the '60s up to today, if there is a linearity or just a development and I couldn't come up with anything. I could come up with a technical history, which is possible to describe. A real history of sound for the composed music, that's quite easy to do, there are certain paradigms under which I can label or sub-label music, but I have the feeling that although there is a strive not to repeat oneself, there is not really historical development or innovation [in improvised music]. Is innovation something important for improvised music?

LQN: Well, I'm not sure that it's important, because there is for example this glass of a bottle, which you see for the first time, but five seconds after it's not the same, because maybe the light changed on it. So, „new“ is only the ability to have a new sight on things. BG: It's different...

LQN: It's not new in terms of history. Maybe the reason why I was attracted by improvisation – of course, I say that afterwards – is because it seemed to be, that to freely improvise was escaping from history. In that way you can also listen to a Mozart sonata, with a new hearing, and it's absolutely new, despite it was written two hundreds years ago. The most important thing, even if it sounds naive, is to enchant everything you touch, you see or you listen to, which is pretty difficult in our society.

BG: That's only one way that I would accept completely, saying that knowledge has being processed in the act of playing. Of course, you don't need to be able to describe it in a very linear way, but I ask myself if „the new“ is important. I found Ninh's answer very helpful with this. At the same time I ask myself: I've learned to see the shock as a really very important aesthetic experience. I have been shocked by music maybe five times in my life, but these moments I will never forget and they make me keep on listening to more music. The shock is not the only thing; we had the „magical moments“ – be it what it is – but these, of course, are also experiences I'm looking for as a listener. We discussed the

„magical moment“. The shock, as such, has never really been discussed. This would be the result of an innovation, having something completely unthinkable happen all of a sudden. I remember seeing a piece by Alan Hilario in February: it was not the most fantastic piece, but all of a sudden the musicians got up and lifted the grand piano up, and I felt physically threatened just by the idea of them lifting up the piano – the instrument might break, whatever. These are things, which for me would be innovative in that sense.

RT: If I think about London in the period of the '60s-'70s, my observation is, that there was absolutely the need for individuals to make their mark as individuals: to chisel out their vocabularies, to chisel out who they were, and to kind of stamp it into the musical situation that they were in. I think that has changed: now, the vocabularies have been defined, and my feeling is, that there is a move by musicians away from ego and individualism in that wave that used to exist – and it really existed: there were fights and arguments. It wasn't a lovely scene necessarily. There were real disputes. People were pushed off stage by other people, physically pushed off. There was real conflict, it wasn't a nice, comfortable music making situation, not just in London, maybe internationally. Amongst the musicians I knew, there was a real need that you define something on your instrument, you extend, you work your vocabulary, you get your stuff together, not as a product, but you make sure, that that process is absolutely real, because that defines something who you are. I get the feeling that's kind of changed now and music became sophisticated, far too sophisticated. Now, as Richard said, it's about listening and I'm not sure that I agree with that: the way you listen is extraordinary strange, how you apprehend what someone else is doing is an extraordinary thing. I get the feeling that now musicians have pulled off that need in the same way, and the music as a consequence is kind of comfortable, tasteful, everyone is hyper-listening and it looses just an enormous amount of vitality as a consequence. In the early LMC there were a lot of extraordinary, bizarre things happening. It wasn't necessarily about a performance being a success, there was no aesthetic

convenience. There was all kinds of stuff going on...

JW: I mean, isn't it that still true today? I am a little bit confused about your point: it seems that you are saying that, because in the '60s and '70s people were almost egomaniacal about defining their musical and improvisational persona to the point of pushing each other off stage and fighting, that that made the music better than it is now.

RT: No, it wasn't those particular things, I don't think it made the music better, it's not about better, there was an urgency...

AL: I'd guess you are right, because I don't feel the same urgency, which perhaps you felt then.

BS: Maybe what you miss now in the improvisation scene, maybe it's happening in the hip-hop scene or somewhere else and not in our scene. You have been pioneers in the '60s. I grew up with a table guitar and I don't play that guitar any more, because it's connected with Keith Rowe, and a lot of people did it for a long time, and we were educated somehow by these improvisers from the '60s. Today we are more reflecting all together about different kinds of technologies, digital world, different kinds of music – ambient, noise, rock, whatever – and so, maybe it's not a time which is quick for our scene...

BG: I would like maybe to pick up something else you said, which is finding your own personal style and the importance of doing so, because I think none of the musicians here have not worked on that. The difference seems to be the aggression or the egomaniac style with which you get into public with that...

JW: I still think, that it works nobody pushes each other off the stage. Nowadays it works in more settled ways.

RT: That was a particular story about a very particular person with another particular person, who was extremely particular, because he was playing a particular kind of instrument, that the other particular person regarded as non-instrument in a particular kind of way...

JW: See, now they just go home and write an insulting blog and de-friend them on Facebook.

RB: Going back to the '60s, when Cornelius Cardew was writing his *Towards an Ethic of Improvisation*, which was written around '71, I think, there he was saying, that one of the

most important qualities for an improvising musician to have is forbearance. This is one of the reason why improvisation from its beginning is really associated with radical politics as well, because it has to do with entering into fruitful relationships with one's fellow human beings in a way, which is not necessarily available in very many walks of life.

RT: I love the romance of that, but just I don't think that that's true.

RB: No, maybe you're right...

RT: When I entered into the world of improvising I thought there would be a whole set of values about the way musicians related to each other and I don't think, that that was the case at all.

BG: It's a question of social behavior. Richard made an important point, because this has to do with how you treat one another and how you do it musically. The aggression is also an aesthetic quality, it is also a possibility, as politeness is also a possibility. I do have the feeling in fact, as Roger was saying, that the improvised music I've been hearing for the last couple of years is quite polite. Is rather polite where the group is trying to find together that spiritual „magic moment“ or not. I think [the aggression] is an aesthetic option, that has not been taken for a long time or it's not that important any more.

JW: In a way, it seems to me, that the politeness can be misunderstood: sometimes you hear music, that's sort of tentative, where almost nobody wants to do anything that doesn't sound good. There are improvisation performances, where I know nobody will take a risk and that's different than being polite. But I think that also sometimes the music sounds polite, because people think being rude is just very '60s..., it has already been done before...

BG: Maybe I'm a romantic, but I feel that going on the barricades, looking for a conflict and a certain degree of aggression is also a way of moving and changing things, and the polite way is maybe not such an effective way of doing so: for me it is a political and social metaphor. It's still in a way subversive to make music like this, but at the same time it feels consolidated to a certain degree. That is for me a crucial question, but maybe one that I would look back at in ten years or so. I think at the moment it's very hard to say something about consolidation or the idea of not-movability of a certain kind of music.





links: Caspar Johannes Walter  
rechts: Richard Barrett  
(Fotos: Martin Kurtenbach)



# compromise

## PODIUM 3

### [Rück]Kopplung

**RB** Richard Barrett  
**EH** Elisabeth Harnik  
**TL** Thomas Lehn  
**AL** Anton Lukoszevieze  
**LQN** Le Quan Ninh  
**MP** Melvyn Poore  
**JW** Jenniffer Walshe  
**BG** Björn Gottstein  
**A** Audience

BG: Any questions?

A [Maciej Sledziecki]: Could you describe the difference between the last piece [*Codex X*] and the improvisations before and how it changed in regards to your mental state of mind when improvising?

LQN: The difference is: in *Codex X* are some indications, which leads you to make something, that you probably wouldn't do if you are improvising. There are, we could say, four patterns and some improvisations in between. In the patterns you can play the notes, or you can play against them, or accompany them etc. For me it was like a game; to have fun in imitating or to invent the opposite or doing nothing. It's really like playing a game.

AL: My difference was that I was waiting in Richard's piece [*Codex X*] and in the other things I wasn't waiting. [laughing in audience]

MP: Maybe Richard would like to say something about his piece.

RB: Since Björn announced I was going to say something, I just say a few short things: I think I feel a bit uneasy about people referring to „my piece“ as if this is...

AL: Our piece...

RB: Yes, our piece..., as if it is a composition of mine. What I am trying to do really is to provide just some kind of framework for free improvisation, and you might ask why would I need to do that, or why was it desirable to do that. I think, the more people you have

improvising together then you can imagine from one point of view the music is a little bit like an object or an organism, which is evolving maybe a little bit independently from anyone individual in it; and the more individuals you have, the bigger and heavier that organism becomes, and becomes very difficult to move from one place to another. So, basically the only reason for making any kind of score was to lighten that organism up, to give it a certain lightness, which we could then play through or wait through. But I also think – maybe I'm too much of a composer – when I was thinking what to do for this situation, I was hearing it quite clearly as I was thinking about writing it; of course in the full knowledge that when it happened it will be completely different from that. But somehow I think it was important to have some kind of precise focus to begin with, because that would form the basis of a focused improvisation as things went on. So, it's a little bit like a ladder you climb up to get on the roof, and once you are on the roof you don't need the ladder anymore.

BG: Ninh said it is a little bit like playing a game; there is a tradition of game pieces like John Zorn's *Cobra* for example. Was that part of the idea or is that new to you?

RB: I am not so interested in doing things like that, because I think pretty much the only thing that can be re-thought of as compositional in something like this is the shape, that it has in time as it evolves and as things change, for example the improvisations in between the more specific parts have more and more players as they go on starting with two and ending with everybody. The problem I have with the game piece idea is, that in a way it specifies too much, and in other ways it doesn't specify how the piece evolves, what the evolution in time of it is, which is one of the things that I found most interesting to work with in this kind of situation.

BG: There is one other question I have: some years ago when we talked about a different piece of the *Codex* series, you mentioned the idea, that there could maybe be something like jazz standards for this kind of improvised music, and that the *Codex* scores first lead to constructing something like a jazz standard. Is that still an idea that's around?

Jennifer Walshe  
(Foto: Martin Kurtenbach)



RB: No, I don't want to say really..., I think, for me it's also a learning process to see, if you like, that if you reduce the role of a composer, to see how far it can be reduced, and still create this lightness in movement that I was talking about before. I think something like this is quite ephemeral in a way, it's something which is conceived for a specific occasion and it belongs to all of these other people as much as it does to me. I think, that's one sense in which it does resemble a jazz tune, that the composer of a jazz standard or any kind of traditional jazz piece is not necessarily the most important person, when the music gets to be heard. There are various of course famous jazz tunes, who's composers have almost been completely forgotten, because they are associated with one or more particular recordings, which form the identity of that piece. I think, that was the idea, rather than thinking these things go out into a repertoire and that they've used, because it's just something for a certain occasion.

BG: Thomas, you as a curator, is this last piece kind of the synthesis that the title of the festival promises?

TL: In a way yes, because there are both elements as Richard described, that you have given parts or frames, and inside of these, there is space which you can fill up in your own way. I don't know how much you brought into these frames, which define what to do...

RB: Not very much.

TL: So, it was basically giving a space where people improvise.

RB: Well, curiously, sometimes people speak of composition which contains improvisation as liberating the performer from the tyranny of notation, that used to be something people talked about a lot in the 1960's for instance – not that I remember it myself.

MP: That was when politics was important.

RB: Right, but, actually, my contention is, when you have a group of this size, it's more liberating to have a framework to work with, because I have heard a number of free improvisations by larger groups, larger than this, and I think, when I'm taking part on those things I often feel very constrained, because, going back to my previous analogy, there is this huge mass of music, which needs somehow to be moved around; it's so heavy, it's almost

impossible to move. So, in a certain way, the compositional interference in the improvisation is intended to be a liberating factor rather than something, which cages people in.

BG: Maybe I could ask Thomas once again maybe to reflect on what he heard and saw during this weekend, because he is the only one – even though he is an active musician – who did not play a note, but thought the whole thing up. I mean the confrontation between compositional music and improvised music was obviously there, and it could be heard to a certain extend, could not be heard in other pieces. I found it quite interesting, that certain pieces were not to be understood as primarily being composed when heard, other pieces were. I guess the question is very easy: for you as a festival curator was this a successful opposition?

TL: In my perception I would say yes. For us three curators – for Tiziana, Joachim and myself – the idea of the festival was about to search not for the „comprovisation“ as such, but for the juxtaposition and presence of both forms of musical creation, and to integrate both in a balanced way under the same festival roof. That was the basic idea at first. Usually you have the separation, or one form of music making is stronger represented in a festival program than the other.

A [Achim Tang]: For me, there was one thing I found very interesting: the approach the musicians had towards the music when performing a composed piece was very different to playing an improvised piece, even though the material in the composed and the improvised pieces was kind of similar. It was in a way astonishing to me, the interpreter is connected with the music in a very different way.

TL: Well, I actually thought, when the Thürmchen Ensemble played the piece by Carola Bauckholt [*Klarinetten trio*], that the way how they played was very organic, like an improvisation can be. I noticed that especially with this piece, I don't know how you perceived that...

LQN: Well, I agree with you. I mean, you know, composed or improvised, it's really a question of presence. And for me these two evenings were like the celebration of musicians. Musicians, they can improvise or

they can play [a composed piece], but they are here and now, and they have a strong presence; and in a way it's a good thing, because the compositions have to be interpreted by human beings, and the improvisations have to be played by human beings, and for me it's like to be proud of being a musician, as a worker – really! We have to put the hand into the sound and in the silence, and you have to do the job; and it's for me something like that.

MP: I want to say something about the space between what we're calling composed music and free improvised music. We actually did experience that my piece for example, there is no written score of it, yet. But, it's a kind of pool of material, but the material itself is structured, it's composed, but it's moveable, you can move things around, it's modular. We also had some things which were very similar in the free improvised music as well, where there were sections or whole pieces – actually we had one this evening – which were very limited in their material: very similar to Elisabeth's piece [Elisabeth Harnik's *šum*], the first piece on the program where the material is very limited and the whole piece is very static; it's just something which is there. The one of the things, that I find interesting about the various approaches to composing and putting improvisation in a composing context or the other way around is how we limit the material and how we generate form, supposing, I guess the two main aspects of what we are trying to do.

BG: Yes, but the limitation of material seem to be there. And there is – Burkhard earlier called it a „jail“ – a certain disposition which we work with. But the creation of form is for me the moment that the scissor opens, and it's not really comparable at all.

MP: But you're completely differently approaching form as an improviser than you do as a composer, of course.

BG: Yes, but not the material necessarily.

MP: No, the material can be the same, can be exactly the same.

A [Frank Gratkowski]: I want to say something: yesterday, it was funny because of the discussion before, I listened to the first piece [duo Frederic Rzewski / Roger Turner] sometimes with the intention of listening to

a new music piece – just to give it a try. So, what would it be, if you see that piece in a complete new music situation, and pretend, or think, it's completely written: it would work and it would have been a very very interesting composition. It was just what happened to me and I think it also has a lot to do with what you think what you get, in a way: this is improvised and this is composed, and you have a kind of preset in the audience, because you expect to listen to a composition, or you expect to listen to an improvisation, and you already make a difference. And I do not really agree, that it's always different what's improvised and what's composed, because you can really improvise in a compositional manner. It's interesting, it felt different by just thinking about listening to a composed piece. It's setup upfront because you read the program, this is a composition, this is an improvisation, and then you already judge in a certain way; the expectation is a different one.

MP: This is a completely new area, which we could but don't want to open up now...

BG: Due to the fact that we are all kind of tired, or some of us are very hungry, I would like to close the discussion at this point. Thanks for being here one more time.

v. l. n. r.:  
Richard Barrett,  
Roger Turner,  
Jennifer Walshe,  
Elisabeth Harnik  
(Foto: Luis Neuenhofer)



oben: Burkhard Stangl,  
unten: Frederic Rzewski  
(Fotos: Martin Kurtenbach)



oben vorne: Anton Lukoszevieze  
oben hinten: Roger Turner  
unten: Elisabeth Harnik  
(Fotos: Martin Kurtenbach)







links: Roger Turner  
rechts: Lê Quan Ninh  
(Fotos: Martin Kurtenbach)



Auch wenn der Festivalname eine Synthese versprach, ging es am Ende doch weniger um das Komprovisieren als neue, Komposition und Improvisation überwindende Kunstform, sondern zunächst einmal um die Unterschiede zwischen diesen beiden Formen der musikalischen Praxis. Fast alle im Festival vertretenen Musiker sind sowohl in Improvisationszusammenhängen aktiv, als auch mit komponierter Musik – sei es als Komponist, sei es als Interpret – befasst. Es sollte also gar nicht um die Auf- oder Abwertung zweier ästhetischer Sphären gehen, sondern um Gemeinsamkeiten und Differenzen, um die Eigenheiten und Möglichkeiten verschiedener ästhetischer Strategien.

Somit herrschte in den Podiumsdiskussionen auch weitgehend Einverständnis darüber, dass sowohl die Komposition als auch die Improvisation lautere und sinnvolle Verfahren sind, wenn es darum geht, einem musikalischen Gedanken mit zeitgenössischen Verfahren und Techniken Ausdruck zu verleihen. Beide Ansätze haben die Erweiterung des Klangfundus ermöglicht, haben neue Form- und Kooperationsmodelle hervorgebracht und lassen sich gleichermaßen auf einfache und komplexe Klangideen anwenden – ganz gleich, ob der Fokus dem Theatralischen gilt, wie die einer latent renitenten Verweigerungshaltung geschuldeten Performance von Frederic Rzewski und Roger Turner, oder ob die Instrumente auf ihre akustische Peripherie hin auskultiert werden, wie in Melvyn Poores elektronischer Komposition auf der Basis von Tubaklängen *Donne That*, ob das Modell des Songs erodiert wird, worauf Burkhard Stangl und Jennifer Walshe es absahen, oder ob komplexe Rhythmen miteinander

verschachtelt werden, was Carola Bauckholt in ihrem *Klarinetten trio* genauso gelang, wie Richard Barrett und Lê Quan Ninh in ihrer gemeinsamen Improvisation. Trotzdem blieben viele das Ethos der Avantgarde betreffende Fragen offen, wie die nach der Innovation, nach dem Schock oder nach soziopolitischen Implikationen, die als ästhetische Kategorien keine primären oder gar hinreichenden Bedingungen der neuen Musik mehr zu sein scheinen. Hingegen wurden Fragen nach der sozialen Praxis des Improvisierens, nach der Meditation als einer ästhetischen Haltung und nach den Möglichkeiten schöpferischen Zuhörens virulent.

Verblüffend blieben die Unterschiede, die im Vortrag komponierter und improvisierter Musik zutage tragen und die sich allenfalls als ein Art Klangaura apostrophieren lassen. Die strukturierte Organisation des Klangs bzw. einer Klangfarbe, wie sie dem Thürmchen Ensemble in Caspar Johannes Walters *durchscheinender Etüde* gelang, ist in der Improvisation selbst bei einem pointiert und artikuliert spielenden Perkussionisten wie Roger Turner eher nicht zu bewerkstelligen. Hier berührte *comprovisé* Fragen nach der Metaphysik des Klangs, die im Podium unter dem Verweis auf magische Momente, auf einem der Musik innewohnenden Zauber und der ihr eigenen Energie angedeutet, aber nicht aufgelöst werden konnten. Wohl aber wurde im Verlaufe der Debatten klar, dass sich weder die Improvisation, noch die Komposition auf wenige Begriffe reduzieren lässt, sondern dass jeder Musik aus einem anderen Antrieb heraus musiziert und dass die Frage, wie sich dieser Antrieb kanalisiert, ob man zum Instrument oder zum Notenpapier greift, vielleicht weniger wichtig ist, als man lange hat glauben müssen.

**BJÖRN GOTTSTEIN**

THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE  
v. l. n. r.:  
Diego Montes,  
Dorothea Eppendorf  
Caspar Johannes Walter  
(Foto: Martin Kurtenbach)



Richard Barrett,  
Anton Lukoszevieze,  
Roger Turner,  
Frederic Rzewski  
(Foto: Marion Wörle)



## FESTIVAL PROGRAMM

Freitag 19.06.2009

PODIUM 1 [Z/S]EITENSPRÜNGE

### Konzert 1

FREDERIC RZEWSKI, ROGER TURNER  
JENNIFER WALSH, BURKHARD STANGL  
MELVYN POORE: *Donne That* (2009)  
ANTON LUKOSZEVIEZE, ELISABETH HARNIK, LÊ QUAN NINH

### Konzert 2

THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE Carola Bauckholt: *Klarinetten trio* (1993)  
MELVYN POORE, RICHARD BARRETT, ELISABETH HARNIK  
JENNIFER WALSH: *The Dowager Marchylove's The Wasistas of Thereswhere*  
THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE Christian Pfeiffer: *aphel aber* (2008)

Samstag 20.06.2009

PODIUM 2 [ANTI]MATERIE

### Konzert 3

THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE Elisabeth Harnik: *šum* (2004)  
RICHARD BARRETT, LÊ QUAN NINH  
FREDERIC RZEWSKI: *Nanosonatas, Book 5* (2008)  
BURKHARD STANGL, ANTON LUKOSZEVIEZE, ROGER TURNER

### Konzert 4

ANTON LUKOSZEVIEZE Jennifer Walshe:  
*This is why people o.d. on pills* (2004)  
MELVYN POORE, BURKHARD STANGL, FREDERIC RZEWSKI, LÊ QUAN NINH  
THÜRMCHEN ENSEMBLE Caspar Johannes Walter:  
*durchscheinende Etüde IV/d* (1992/93)  
JENNIFER WALSH, RICHARD BARRETT, ELISABETH HARNIK, ROGER TURNER  
TUTTI „KOMPROVISATION“ von Richard Barrett: *Codex X*

PODIUM 3 [RÜCK]KOPPLUNG

*Der letzte Vorhang*  
(Foto: Martin Kurtenbach)



# IMPRESSUM

## VERANSTALTER

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## PROGRAMM

THOMAS LEHN, TIZIANA BERTONCINI, JOACHIM ODY

## GRAFIK/LAYOUT

MARION WÖRLE

## HERAUSGEBER

ZAM E.V.

## FOTOS

MARTIN KURTENBACH, LUIS NEUENHOFER, MARION WÖRLE

## TONAUFNAHMEN/KONZERTMITSCHNITTE

MACIEJ SLEDZIECKI

## MIX/MASTERING KONZERTMITSCHNITTE

THOMAS LEHN

## PODIUMSTRANSKRPTIONEN

TIZIANA BERTONCINI, THOMAS LEHN, ACHIM TANG

comprovis wurde vom Zentrum für Aktuelle Musik – ZAM e.V. veranstaltet und fand im Rahmen von ON-Neue Musik Köln statt. Die Veranstalter danken dem Netzwerk Neue Musik, der Kulturstiftung des Bundes, dem Kulturamt der Stadt Köln, der RheinEnergieStiftung Kultur sowie der SK Stiftung Kultur der Sparkasse KölnBonn für ihre finanzielle Unterstützung, ohne die das Festival comprovis nicht realisierbar gewesen wäre. Ferner gilt unser Dank auch der Kölner Gesellschaft für Neue Musik.

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