

An interview – Ralf Jankovsky asked the questions

00:017

How do you want to introduce yourself?

5 It is difficult to introduce myself. Shall I introduce myself as head of the studio here or as human
being or as musician? Whereby the question arises, if you can act in the studio here as musician. I
think I would introduce myself here in this studio in an actual situation in a manner that I am
presumably working in this studio today, yesterday and tomorrow too as studio musician, as
10 electronic musician, who turns to music in a completely new way. The fundamental difference would
be that we are in a room, in which a grand piano is standing or in a church with an excellent organ on
the gallery above. I would consider this contrast as important.

01:12

How did it all begin?

15 It began with an offer which came into my life – not only in my life, but also in history of music – into
the world, wherever it came from, and one could call it electronic music. You have already heard of,
in France, you have heard the name. I got to know electronic music during my studies in Cologne. At
that time the musician Stockhausen, an excellent artist, acted there and presented his works to the
world as well as to the audience and the conservatory in Cologne. The reactions varied considerably.
20 There was a musicologist, who said, these are the sounds of hell. Others, including me, were
fascinated by this innovation. The fascination decreased again, but suddenly instruments were
offered here in Freiburg, with which you could produce the same as Stockhausen brought to the
world as innovation. In addition, when I was working at that time as a musician who played Bach or
Reger etc. or Chopin, there was a desire, the question was there: Is there anything else besides what
25 you can produce on the grand piano or the organ here in the conservatory? The question arose, and I
believed the answer is to be found in the so called electronic music. And thus I started an activity
which continues until this day, which began then in the 50ies with Stockhausen, and came to the
world in the 80ies, what I just have said, due to the offer – here in South Germany by the firm
Rehberg. I took it with joy and it goes on continuously up to this interview.

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03:46

Were there milestones in the development of electronic music?

There are many milestones up to today. The firsts milestones were the instruments AKS which
became widely distributed, then great milestones came from Japan, instruments as 100M, the name
35 perhaps doesn't say very much, then America rose, Moog – these were milestones continuing up to
this day. These days, Moog is in America Verbos, AKS which I mentioned is Vermona in Saxony, newly
in Cologne klangbau, a firm or engineer who produces such instruments, a quite new milestone. But
that doesn't mean that again and again an absolute novelty arose. The basis was the same, but
evolutionary or revolutionary innovations were contributed. Thus I can say I refer now to the
40 milestone e.g. 100M (Roland), this is a classical instrument and will remain a milestone Today, you
can purchase this instrument second hand at a relatively high price.

05:22

Can you speak of music in the case of electronic music?

45 **After all, the tones are produced physically.**

This question is extremely interesting. One should define exactly the meaning of music, but that is
already done. I think nothing must be added to it. Total Western music consists of the phenomenon
tone, as everybody knows, and the second element is the voice, in Latin vox. This is the basis of the
total system, and the voices are always defined which is quite important. And here is the quite great
50 distinction between classical music and electronic music that this definition, the tone is cancelled. It
can be roughly said, the tone has changed into noise. Noise contains tones, you can extract them,
you can make noises from tones. But it is the basic point of departure that noise and also tone mix –
also so called – represents a complexity. And thereby the question rises, how reality faces us – I don't

refer to musical but general reality. It faces us always in a complexity. Looking out of the window, I see not only one tree, but an abundance of objects, of trees etc. Classical music has made a choice of this complexity well according to the human being, as it seems. The human mind desires obviously such a choice. Humans begin naturally to ask, "What's this, is this a tree, is this a human being?"

5 Well, he tries always to define the object and hence his world becomes clear. And in the same way, the huge noise, the possibilities of noise offered by nature, the sonic complexity becomes clear by the tone. Thus in West, but not only in West, rather throughout the world this kind of music became established and convinced entirely humans everywhere. That has always been so, I suppose, already the Ancient Egyptians made music with tones. And now, – you can look behind – something totally

10 different comes into the world. Instead of a grand piano with keys with the different tones – there are by the way only 12, a very important fact – is here an instrument without keys, only with controllers which generate some sonic event, completely free, undefinable. The reason for this is, they have an undefinable background and can generate out of it an undefinable result. And this – now I make a huge leap – causes a certain dissatisfaction for the listener, whilst tonal music effectuates a sense of security. Listening to a tone you have absolutely a feeling of certainty. As well

15 as I have a feeling of certainty if I can say this is a tree, this is a human being. If you can't define an object, uncertainty arises. And thereby the question is answered that classical music, tonal music effectuates that what humans always desire, namely certainty. The certainty has changed into – I don't know if one should say uncertainty -, at least into something which is unstable, not defined and

20 also inscrutable.

10:03

Electronic music – has it something to do with art?

The question of art arises here too. Art means selection. You can ask if nature as it faces us, is a work

25 of art. Many philosophers, probably also the Greeks, thought so. I would say not at all, it is a hotchpotch of properties, of possibilities. Thereby a new word comes into play. Nature is a conglomeration of possibilities, art is a certain selection, how one can do something. Well, a work of art is e.g. a Greek or an Egyptian statue or a work by Beethoven. That is art. What is standing here in the background in this studio or what I produce, is technology. And thereby we turn to the Greek

30 term "τέχνη" (téchne). "τέχνη" means not only art, but simply work of art, tool, which you use. Here the classical thought of art, closely related to aesthetics, comes into play. Aesthetics, a new term too, beauty, balance, symmetry. Here also, one must say blatantly, nature is never symmetrical, only sometimes beautiful. And so you can sometimes produce deliberately something beautiful, perhaps a work of art with these electronic instruments, if you wish. But normally, they aren't works of art.

35 Personally, I use the term process. They are technical, musical, acoustical processes as you can say, the world is a process, by the way without a target. A work of art has always a target, a beginning and an end. But these processes are beginning and ending at any time. Well to answer to the question, In fact, the character as art is totally and wittingly cancelled in these instruments here, in these sequences of sounds so called music.

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12:37

Do you have to learn to listen and to comprehend music of this kind?

This question is very important. The question is what do humans, children hear by nature? I suppose, to my knowledge, a child, a baby when crying produces at once all sounds of nature. A crying baby

45 expresses itself in all possible tonal colours, sounds, high and low, dark and bright, and the whole becomes rationalized by the language. Letters arise then, the letters and words correspond by the way to the tones, and so the world is categorized. And now, you have to learn, so to speak, this complexity, the perception of the complexity as I did. That is my answer to this question. And it may be, that one doesn't want to and says, "No, I don't like to perceive the complexity, that's too complicated, too exhausting", as I again and again heard in performances . Well, to hear a tone, a C major chord, that's not exhausting, that's very great and satisfying, but to perceive sounds which move permanently due to their ambiguity is an enormous effort, and you have to must or have to desire to learn it. And vice versa - , if someone has become used to these sounds – they are also

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called spectral sounds -, that he says, classical music – I express it blatantly – it is simply boring due to its tones. You know exactly what is there and what is to come. The level of information is extremely low, while the level of information of an electronic sound, even of a sine wave, a quite simple wave, is very high. “How does a sine wave sound?” You can also say, instead of drinking fantastic wine from the Kaiserstuhl, “How does really clear water taste?” It has indeed an interesting taste and, “What can I do with it?”

15:27

How do you come from the organ to electronic music?

10 You really come to it only from the organ, never from singing, as a singer. The organ, where I come from, is the first great synthesizer, a technical instrument, into which you feed in an enormous variety that nature provides. And this technical instrument, the organ is extremely diverse. If you play the piano or the violin, you will notice that the violin only sounds as a violin, and the piano always sounds as a piano. And a voice sounds always as a voice, enormously skilled. And if you play on the
15 organ, you suddenly discover the tone colours, called registers, change totally. When I was sitting at the organ in former Silesia, where I come from, I could play there a C major chord not only as chord as on the grand piano, but I could play the chord with the register viola da gamba, then it sounded as a viola da gamba, synthetically, that’s important. The organ doesn’t produce natural but synthetical tones which are artificial and are remote from nature. I could also play the C major chord with a
20 viola or a flute or a trumpet. It sounded the same and yet quite different. Another example, the songs “Little John” or “In the Snow Mountains” were sang to me, and suddenly I could play the melody on the organ with a trumpet and a flute and a viola da gamba. Indeed, this was an enormous experience. And now, I make a huge leap, a synthesizer doesn’t have only 40 registers like an organ but 400. You have 400, 4000 registers which you can shape by yourself. The registers of an organ are
25 defined by the organ builder, who has built the 40, 10 or 20 registers. On the instrument behind me, you can create with the existing means every possible sound – on the organ, you call them register, but you can also say sound colours. Thus you reach a diversity which an organist who permanently changes the tone colours is used to. He can also play a classical piece with different tone colours. I said just now a folk song, he can play a prelude of Bach with any number of tone colours. If I have
30 an organ with 10 registers, a mathematician can calculate how many combinations with two or three registers are possible. The same is multiplied into infinity in electronic music, until today. Even a quite modern classical instrument of Roland or of another firm provides presets corresponding exactly to the registers of an organ. The organ in Silesia where I come from, had thus 16 registers, every one being named, e.g. flute or viola da gamba or bordun. These were presets I couldn’t shape.
35 Here, on the electronic instruments, I have perhaps also a cello, but I can shape it in every possible direction, and thereby the definition and clarity are lost. All becomes blurred into infinity whilst an organ is relatively finite. The grand piano, I suppose, is quite finite. But thus we have a certain view of the world. The world consists of an infinit, which appears in these musical instruments. I may mention all, the GRP behind me or a new Roland instrument or a Vermona from Saxony, everything is the same. This infinity and indefinability manifest themselves in every instrument to a certain degree.

20:20

Can you describe your daily work?

45 Every day, I’m working five or six hours or even more in the studios – meanwhile there are several studios. Sometimes, I have a fixed plan of what I want to do, which instrument I will use. Concretely, some days ago I picked once again a CD and edited the files in form of ring modulation with the Italian GRP. Furthermore, I have the possibility of programming sounds, I can make recordings, I can listen to my pieces. Anyway, every day there is a wide range of possibilities, which I can use without
50 getting bored at all.

21:26

Have you also given concerts?

5 Naturally, we began in the 80ies then to give concerts, but concert is not the right term. It is interesting, that these events are often called performances. This term is appropriate, because new possibilities were performed. A concert is completely different, it means competition, one demonstrates his great achievement in playing piano or violin. Possibilities were performed, and I seized the opportunities without the need to travel elsewhere. These opportunities were to use the aula and other rooms in the local university of education Freiburg, in order to present these performances to a more or less large audience. We did this many weekends, always for two days in 10 the afternoon, and I began the performances without any fixed program. Different productions were performed. And subsequently, I asked in Emmendingen, where I live and where is an excellent hall, the "Steinhalle" whether I may present here, as a citizen of this town, my performances. I obtained the permission without having to pay. After some time, I must mention it, we got together and founded the association ZeM (Center of electronic Music) in which interested persons, students, 15 among others a physicist, with whom we cooperated. It is preferable, if you don't want to go it alone. Then we performed as a team, but partly I performed alone, sounds as well as explanations. I would like to address once again the question of how you can make it accessible to human beings. It is necessary to explain these things in order to get some kind of resonance. We did so. The aula was never full, quite logically, nor was the Steinhalle, but we had an interested audience, also the press 20 reacted as you can read on the internet. Viewed in this light, I can draw a positive balance. 20 to 30 years ago, there were several concerts every year, the last in June 2014. I will probably no longer perform, but I may do, if an opportunity arises. I did this work with great interest, and I can look back upon these 30 years with great pleasure. But the activity shifted to the internet where you can call up these things at any time – performances in the Steinhalle or at the University of Education in 25 Freiburg (PH Freiburg) took an afternoon, whilst the files on the internet are dedicated to eternity. The transmission to the internet is comparable to printed notes which everybody can position on the piano and play or learn to play. Likewise everybody can listen to such music on the internet, even more than once, which can also be criticized. This is the result of 30 years long work.

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What fascinates you about electronic music?

That's simply the sensual experience of sound and its diversity. That's just like if one is walking one's whole life through the regions or climbing mountains or travelling by car through the area, then you gain permanently a sensual pleasure. It's quite clear the desire of sensual pleasure must exist. And I 35 wanted to have a certain diversity which is missing in the tone of a grand piano, or a classical musical piece, Bach or Beethoven. I must repeat once again, the level of information is extremely low. In contrast, the sensual pleasure of this diversity is new every day, no matter which instrument you purchase or alter, where my work is concerned. To give you a concrete example, yesterday evening I was working with a software, called Zebralette, developed by a very intelligent computer scientist in 40 Berlin. It provides infinite sound possibilities, which I enjoyed yesterday evening and which I will continue to enjoy in the future. And another instrument will have the same effect.

27:22

How do you find access to this music?

45 I would say there must be an inner willingness to be open to something unknown. It's very difficult, because if you are interested in it, you diverge from your listening habits. You can say, you listen to any pop group, then, you are immediately integrated in the community. But you can't say, well, I listen to electronic music. A special interest must exist as also in other areas. I don't know, whether you can interest somebody from the outset in a Romanesque basilica. People prefer perhaps to view 50 a modern building. Hence you must be interested in discovering the background, the possibilities of a world. If not, I think, you wouldn't be successful, that's my insight based on 30 years experience. We tried it, with some success, but in principle, I repeat, this music is not in accordance with the normal

human ability of perception, it requires an ability of perception, which first has to be learned, but you can stimulate interest.

29:04

5 **30 years electronic music – can you take stock?**

Certainly. The balance can be quite personal or factual. The personal balance, not necessarily interesting to others, is that I would pompously say, my destiny satisfied me completely, because I found exactly, what I was searching for, and I could produce, what I was looking for. This is a very personal, even egocentric attitude, which is characteristic of persons, who have created a special style. I think of many visual artists, e.g. Miro and others, who didn't necessarily resonate with their public. The balance in public is relatively small, 30 years ago, it was relatively good. Something new arose, I just was a professor, whose students were very interested, because it was something new. But by and by, it ceased. Perhaps, the effort was too great or the sensual pleasure too weak. From this point of view, I would say my personal balance is especially great, but the factual not at all. Now we have restricted the activity using the internet and thus we have attempted to "immortalize" this work. It is now on the internet and can, I don't know for how long, be called up at any time. A kind of petrification, you may even say a "mummification" of this work has happened, which I find personally enormously satisfying. In contrast, the official balance is not at all satisfying, but I'm content with this. And things will not change. By the way, many artists, with whom you can be compared with, were in a similar situation. An extreme example: The polyphony of Bach has completely disappeared. The balance of Bach at the end of his life was such that his "Art of Fugue" engraved on copper plates, was disposed of, but was recovered however. In the same way, it may be that such instruments are also disposed of. That's just the way it is, isn't it?

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