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The Artist-couple <sabine schäfer // joachim krebs>

There is no English equivalent for the German word "Künstlerpaar". The only solution is to translate it as "artist-couple" or "artist-pair". This is not simply a linguistic nicety. Any attempt to describe the works and practice of <sabine schäfer // joachim krebs> must acknowledge the significance of this term as, since 1995, both artists describe themselves as an artist-couple.

Collaborations between artists have, naturally, always existed: the clearly defined roles of a composer and a librettist can be cited as an example. But fixed activities such as these are inadequate for an understanding of an artist-couple such as <sabine schäfer // joachim krebs>. Both artists have distinct interests and areas of expertise which interact - and perhaps even contradict. Nevertheless, a conjunction of common artistic endeavours results in the joint production of uniquely expressive works. Consequently, new forms have emerged from this synthesis of two individual artists' talents.

Biographies will, of course, reveal many points of contact between each artist. Both were born in Karlsruhe in Germany and both studied piano and composition at the University of Music in the same city.

In the 1980s Sabine Schäfer was involved in numerous interdisciplinary projects both as composer and performer. Her interest in the electroacoustic medium led to experiments in the area of microtonality and to investigations into the artistic application of systems exclusive data in digital sound generators. Several prizes and awards enabled her to continue her studies of subjects such as digital sound synthesis, the computer-controlled player-piano and the control of sound in space at various institutes such as the CCRMA in the USA, the Dutch Institute of Sonology in The Hague and ZKM in Karlsruhe. With the artistic development of the "TopoPhonien", Sabine Schäfer created in the early 1990s a space-sound project which was awarded the Siemens-Medienkunstpreis (Siemens prize for media art) in 1993. As part of this project, a separate exclusive space-sound control system resulted through the co-operation of Karlsruhe University (TH) and ZKM Karlsruhe with which Sabine Schäfer realised a wide variety of sound installations.

From 1968 to the end of the 1970s Joachim Krebs was a member of the group "Checkpoint Charlie", one of the first German politically engaged experimental rock music theatre-groups. His subsequent career could have developed into that of a conventional contemporary composer (the award of the Bonn "Beethoven Prize" and the BRD grant for a residency at the Villa Massimo in Rome as well as numerous performances at important international festivals of contemporary music in the 1980s are some examples of his successes in this area). However, an interest in non-European music - exemplified by numerous concert activities as musician in various intercultural formations until the early 1990s - as well as early and innovative use of the digital sampler as a "concert instrument" since 1985 already characterised the search for a new musical language. Joachim Krebs formulated this new language from the mid-1990s with the development of the "Artificial Soundscapes" project which places primarily natural- and animal sounds, examined "microscopically", at the centre of his artistic interest.



The consistent concern with the role of technology in sound and music is relevant for a thorough consideration of the artist-couple's recent work. Sabine Schäfer worked at the Studio for Electroacoustic Music at Karlsruhe University (TH) in 1981-83 and as early as the 1960s Joachim Krebs was creating noise collages on tape. Since 1995, therefore, their common intention to extend and elaborate expressive potential by means of technology has led to the production of "Klangkunst" or "sound art". In addition, numerous publications provide invaluable insights into their creative processes and the necessary technical resources by which they are realised.

Sound art itself includes many different art-forms and radiophonic art, with its emphasis on sound without visual corroboration, remains a preoccupation for both artists. However, the most significant contribution of the artist-couple is their development of Space-soundInstallations. These installations (which are invariably site-specific) are characterised not only by the loudspeaker configurations within the space, but also by the sounds themselves and the ways in which they move.

The artist-couple have developed different types of Space-soundBody for each venue. Scrupulous attention is given to the placing of loudspeakers in "limbs" of these Space-soundBodies. These limbs facilitate the repertoire of movements - continuous, oscillatory, discrete - by which the chosen space is sonified. Some installations can be walked around, others are entered by the visitor in order to experience different acoustic areas. Other types can even include musicians playing instruments in concert-like situations. Thus, technology is used to illuminate and reveal as the acoustic characteristics of spaces are disclosed to the visitors.

The choice of the term "Space-soundBody" confirms the importance for the artist-couple of the "organic" nature of the sounds they use. These originate in the worlds of humans, animals and nature though song, speech or instrumental sounds are not generally used. During an important phase of the work's production in which found sound material is examined, the digital sampler is used to investigate the inner structure of sounds (a process called EndoSonoScopy by the artist-couple) in order to make audible the inner (sound) structure with its microscopic details. The vocabulary developed in this way promotes a number of subtle discourses as the sound transitions of the Space-soundInstallations interact with the visitors' inner psychological spaces. Events and memories are evoked ranging from the known to the unknowable.

Thus, a visitor to these installations will experience spaces not as inert and empty, but as activated by sound and movement. The Space-soundInstallations of <sabine schäfer // joachim krebs> exemplify a true convergence of human perception and the technological mediation of sound.

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Publication: booklet text for the DVD/CD publication "AquaAngelusVox" by MDG Germany, in January 2004, MDG-924 1254-5