

Gerhard Illi - Drums

From Illinoise with Love



The first steps

Gerhard Illi was born on November 6th 1949 under the sign of Scorpio and with Scorpio in the ascendant. Before reaching the age of one and a half Illi smashed his first tin drum – an experience which was to lead to him being captivated by percussion instruments for the rest of his life. After a succession of toy drums he bought a second-hand military drum at the age of 12, and later replaced it with a genuine Basel Drum. Thus equipped, he played in every single Lucerne carnival bar none, and over the years came to lead the “Gagugger”, one of the most renowned carnival bands of the time. Around the same period he first discovered the ‘drum kit’, and with it, went on to form part of the dance band known as “Les Canards”. Due to their success he was able to buy a new “Ludwig” drum set which still forms the basis of his kit today. With the realisation that commercial dance music imposed limits on his individual creativity, Illi soon left “Les Canards” and began experimentation in other musical directions. Over the next few years Illi immersed himself in the local Jazz and Rock scene until, in 1970, he won Silver Medal for best free jazz drummer at the Zurich International Jazz Festival.

The learning years

Encouraged by this success, Gerhard Illi decided to broaden his musical horizons. Conscious of the limitations imposed by self-teaching, he enrolled in the “Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst” (University of Music) in Graz and over the next three years studied the fundamentals of jazz drumming with Manfred Josel, was introduced to the wonders of collective improvisation by Eje Thelin, and developed a crucial understanding of sound through the electronic music classes of Gösta Neuwirth. Illi understood sound to be the elemental unit of music, and the drum kit (once detached from its purely rhythmical function) served for Illi as an independent medium for harmonic and melodic creativity. Graz proved not just to be a place of study, but also as a place to encounter and exchange other musical ideas. During his time there Illi played with a host of fine musicians including; Leszek Laszlo, Radu Malfatti, Dieter Glawitschnig, Wolfgang Engstfeld, Johannes Faber, Christoph Lauer, Martin Rüegg, Hans Hartmann and Jan Jankeje amongst others. Hoping to put the things he learned into action Illi moved to Düsseldorf in 1974. Together with Bernd Köppen (piano) and Uli Weiche (bass) he formed “Unit”, an innovative re-interpretation of the classical piano trio. Together they performed concerts in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. During this same period Illi played as part of “Synthesis”, which comprised the electronics of Klaus Röder (ex- Kraftwerk), the wind instruments of Axel Petry, Uli Weiche on bass and himself on drums. In 1976 he formed “Die Musikantenkünstler vom Hochniederrhein”, a multimedia orchestra which broke through the frontiers between music, performance, theatre and circus (Tanztee in the Jazz Festival at Moers, Dada Jubilee at Wuppertal with WDR3 television, and 2 months touring through Italy and France, etc.). At the same time he did free-lance work for various bands and also recorded for radio and television with “Die Musikantenkünstler vom Hochniederrhein”, “Unit” and as a trio with Radu Malfatti.

Towards self realization

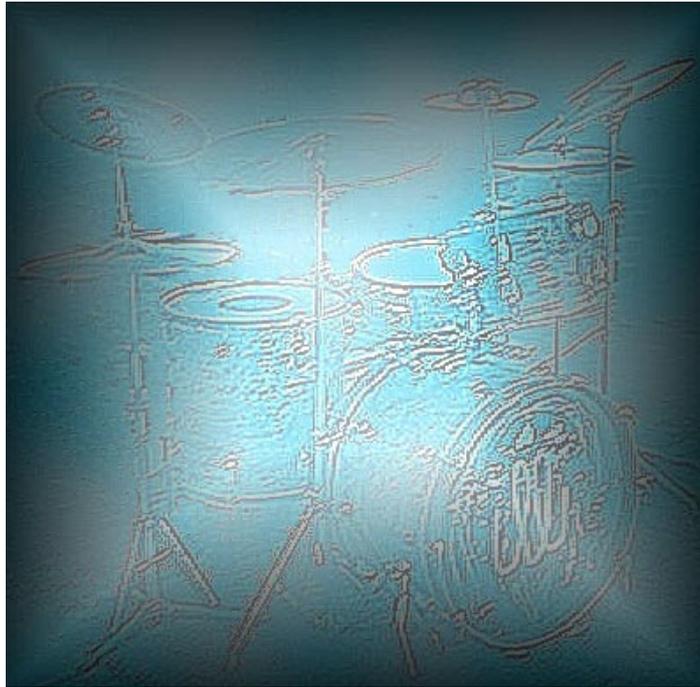
In 1979, fed up with all the paperwork that being the manager of so many bands entailed, Gerhard Illi broke off from his career in Germany and travelled through Southern Europe, spending a year performing as a musical clown. Finally he resurfaced in the South of Spain with a new drum show and, loyal to his conviction that it is important to have no prejudices with regards the audience before which he plays, Illi travelled the country playing in innumerable clubs and discotheques. As a result of the direct contact with his audiences Illi's musical expression continued to improve. At the same time he continued to expand his musical knowledge by playing with a variety of bands such as, "Los Piratas del Sur", with whom he learned a number of classical Spanish dances.

In 1987 Illi settled in the small Andalusian village of Castaño del Robledo (Huelva). Here, during a brief period, he created the pure rock band 'KÉdKÉ' with Emiliano Vázquez, and made three short tours playing Blues with Hary Wetterstein. Later, after meeting Eduardo Polonio y Eduardo Fuentesal in 2001, Illi was invited to the "Confluencias" festival in Huelva where he was confronted once again with contemporary improvised music and his musical circle began to close. Yet more musical experience was gained through a period of travel in India, Nepal, Morocco, Thailand and Bali and thereafter he retired to his small "Chestnut" studio to fully dedicate himself to his latest project, "From Illinoise with Love". The purchase of an electronic drum-set allowed Illi to complete his world of sound and thereafter he dedicated himself to refining the art of story-telling with drums. In 2002 he released a CD called "From Illinoise with Love – Concerto for Lily" and two years later released a follow up DVD, entitled "Lily goes to Cortegana". He collaborated on two editions of "Free and Tapas" at the "Confluencias" festival which featured on a double CD by the Junta de Andalucía. He also played at the "LEM" festival of Barcelona in 2004, "Sensxperiment" at Lucena also in 2004, Huelva's "Confluencias" festival in 2005 and the "Programa de Fomento y Cooperación Cultural 2006", organized by the provincial government of Seville. Finally in the Monumento in Castaño del Robledo on August 23rd 2006, Illi premiered his "Concierto para una Catedral Inacabada" ("Concert for an unfinished cathedral"). Here, his concept of integrating acoustic drum sounds with the sounds produced by an electric drum kit and sampler was first revealed to the public



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From Illinoise with Love



In the beginning there was only the dream... two stones hitting each other, the sound, the rhythm, the ecstasy... the kid – and everyone has a kid inside – sees a drum set, can't resist and begins with the umpteenth realisation of his dream... to tell a story without words... the hits become sounds that get lost in the infinity of space and time... shouts, messages, warmth, smiles... ¡who knows!... the performer is only the transmitter of the eternal rhythm.

The idea

The Project Illinoise emerges from the conviction that it must be possible to create modern relentless music only with a drum set. In the beginning there was the dream to be like Oscar Matzerath who told endless stories with his tin drum. This dream grew bit by bit witnessing the ecstatic rhythms of "Sternenplatz" during the carnival of Lucerne, the echoing of drums through Basel's narrow streets, the large cowbells of Küssnacht, the Drum Fanfares of the Highlands, countless solos of countless drummers, the suffering of the background drummers, ethereal sounds of refined classical percussionists, samba schools in full eruption, the gamelans and their celestial sound, the magic of the drums of the great plains, the exquisite filigrees of ragas played by hand on tabla hides, the rolls of the snare drums in Seville, hand clapping at ferias and romerías, the polirithmical heat of the African continent and his talking drums, the carillon of a lost sanctuary, orgies of magrebi tambourines... all of those and many more have contributed in the course of years dedicated to hearing, learning and practising to make reality the dream of a child who isn't young anymore. How many times did I hear: Don't make that much noise! And there comes Illi – noise from. (Also the most important part of my drum set was made in Chicago, Illinois). From Illinoise with love: With regards to everybody who showed me the way to create sounds and rhythms.

The developmen

I was always fascinated by the Idea of music only by and for a drum set. The first try was at the International Jazz Festival at Zurich in 1970 with remarkable success, winning the silver medal. In Düsseldorf there were a series of solo concerts, still with a normal sized drum set. Always in the search of new sounds it became bigger by the addition of new instruments. Some remain and some were discarded after some exhaustive trials. Still today my drum set represents a snapshot subject to constant evolution and constant changes. Techniques of composition and sound treatment for electronic music learned at Graz have been reincorporated; influences of countless musical styles have been reinterpreted for drums. It is an endless procedure, the farther one gets, the wider the field opens in front of our marvelled senses.

„From Illinoise with Love“ becomes reality

On July 13th 2002 the moment had come: The first CD of the “From Illinoise with Love” project had been recorded. The text on the cover transmits the feeling of that moment::

The great loves are declared always through intimate strokes, fine dragged, full of sensibility, using, worldwide it seems, the methods that are most useful to achieve this: a poem, an elegy, a simple poetry, a sonnet, a ballade, a romance why not?, a water painting, a miniature, a drawing by pen, even the white filigree of a mogul palace or the shout of a fantastic symphony. What a contrast, those soft feelings and the rude hitting of the drums. I was seduced by the idea of expressing my state of lover and being loved, full of joy and gratitude, thorough the art I really master, the one of making noise. So Concerto for Lily was born, the description of an encounter in space and time, which was recorded in her presence on July 13th 2002 in Castaño del Robledo. I hope you feel the same as me in this joyful evening playing the drums and talking about eternal love..

Many more concerts and recordings were to come, each one a different experience, each story with a different ending, an eternal flux of musical ideas made drums. .

The music

Musical pieces are live improvisations. There is no score nor is it needed. Only small structures are used for channelling the overflowing fantasy, but this doesn't imply narrowing my instantaneous creating freedom. Those structures don't have an established order; they also are part of the improvisable material. Now and then one comes up, sometimes none. This continuously changing framework is not limited to the rhythmical flowing, but it includes also tonal and harmonic elements.

Like in a tale there is a musical story going on, in each concert other one, because the influences, the circumstances, space and time are different. Like in fairytales or in legends, from time to time archetypical figures appear. All this with the goal to take the hearer/spectator on a journey into an unknown World full of sounds, sometimes extremely familiar and sometimes new and strange.

The percussion has been erroneously considered as a noisy rhythm instrument, mainly in the European culture. But percussive instruments are, above all, a source of sounds not to be underestimated. On the other hand, the rhythmical element, in its variations and polyrhythmic superpositions, is a primordial piece of musical creation.

Asked about music's future, Dizzy Gillespie answered: "... Music is going where it started, a man with a drum." Jonny Cage points 1937 in the same direction in his "The Future of Music: Credo" when he manifests "Percussion music is a contemporary transition from keyboard-influenced music to the all-sound music of the future. Any sound is acceptable to the composer of percussion music..."

Starting with the preceding ideas, it can easily be understood that it is not a drum solo or an exhibition of a refined technique or of an exceptional speed, but it is a concert of music for drums. .



The drums



*The complete drum set. In the foreground are steeldrums and a set of gamelan gongs.
In the middle one can see the electronic drums and the sampler pad.*

For the most people a drum set is only a rhythm instrument. But it is actually a great source for marvellous sounds which avoid the dictates of the twelve tones. If we also take in consideration that we can extend the set at will, we have nearly infinite possibilities of creation. I always looked up for sounds which fitted perfectly into my musical imagination instead of trusting into a label. Only in this way I'm provided with the necessary tools for converting my sound worlds in an audible reality. The only thing that counts is the experience of sound.

Apart from the usual drums and cymbals I added instruments from the most various percussive traditions. I also incorporated an electronical drum set and a sampler for extending the creation of sounds. A very important fact is that I must be able to play all these instruments really live, so I can translate the vibrations and feelings in music.

Concert for an unfinished Cathedral

The building

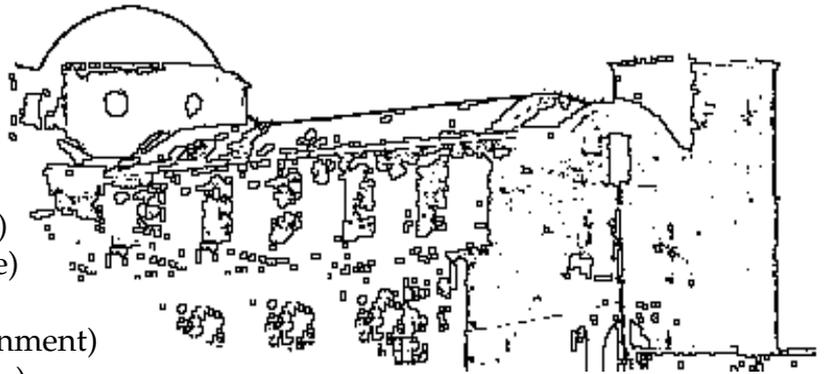
The first thing that captivates the traveller's attention when approaching Castaño del Robledo is a very strange building. At a first glance it appears to be a ruined cathedral, which is strange in a village with no more than 200 habitants. To make the mystery still bigger, it is the new church. The work begun 1788 and was abandoned, unfinished, 1794 because lack of funds, surely a product of the projects megalomania (Castaño had 870 habitants by then!). After its abandonment it was used as a cemetery until 1952. From 1992 to 1994 the building was restored finishing the roof and crowning it with a cupola. Today it is used for cultural events like concerts and theatres.

The concert

The "monumento" seduced me the first time I saw it. I was tempted by the idea of writing a piece inspired by his history, playing with its sound and architecture. After some months of musical preparation – it was necessary to search the sounds needed to reflect its history in the most "visual" way possible – the great moment had come. Thanks to the council on august 23rd 2006 it was possible to premiere "Concierto para una Catedral Inacabada" at the Monumento. In this piece my conception of integration and interaction of acoustical drumming and sounds proceeding from an electronic drum set and a sampler is showed to the public for the first time. All sounds are played live. The concert was recorded and is edited on CD..

The movements

The concert consists of 11 movements which tell the story of the building from the construction up to today. They aren't separated by pauses between them. The structure serves as a guide to the piece but doesn't determine its interpretation. In every moment it lets full freedom to its execution. The movements are like recipes for the creation of sound ambience which induce the listener to imagine the story of such an emblematic building. .



- La Catedral (The Cathedral)
- El Campo (The Countryside)
- La Obra (The Building Site)
- Al Abandono (The Abandonment)
- El Cementerio (The Cemetery)
- La Erosión (The Erosion)
- La Guerra Civil (The Civil War)
- Ese Extraño Edificio (This Strange Building)
- La Restauración (The Restoration)
- Una Realidad Cultural (A Cultural Reality)
- La Catedral (The Cathedral)

Die Aufnahmen



Concerto for Lily

Recorded live in our Chestnut Studio in Castaño del Robledo on July 13th 2002 playing a acoustical drum set.2



Lily goes to Cortegana

LConcert recorded live at the Capitol Theatre in Cortegana on April 16th 2004. Available on CD and DVD.



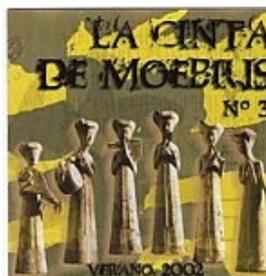
Concierto para una Catedral Inacabada

Cd recorded live in Morón de la Frontera and DVD recorded live in Ecija on October 7th 2006. .



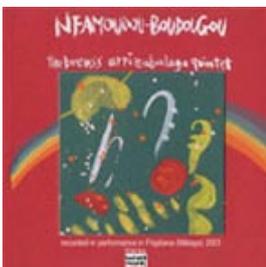
Free & Tapa (Confluencias, Huelva)

Live recordings from the concerts "Free & Tapas" 2001 and 2002. Collective Improvisations. Edited by the "Junta de Andalucía"..



La Cinta de Moebius 3 & 4

Collection of musical pieces from various artists.n.



Nfamoudou-Boudougou

Drum duet together with Javier Carmona on the CD Nfamoudou-Boudougou.

The “Pocket Edition”



It is wonderful to have a really big drum set and to use all the included sounds. But there is also the danger to get lost and to make only cheap showmanship with a lot of exotic instruments without a musical reason. In addition there is a problem with the space at one's disposal. In many Jazz clubs and smaller they don't have a big stage where I can put my complete drum set. And on top of that I really feel as a classical jazz drummer and I like to play with a classical set. That's why I started up with the "Pocket Edition". There is only a basic outfit: Bass drum, snare drum 2 toms, 2 cymbals plus a hi-hat. Nevertheless I added the sampler, so I can work with more sounds. Just like with "From Illinoise with Love" I create world of sounds and I narrate musical stories. I perform also the "Concierto para una Catedral Inacabada" with the "Pocket Edition".

The drum set and his evolution in the modern musi

Bases

If something reflects the modern music, then it is surely the rhythmization of the same, beginning from the ragtime until to the Drum & bass, the last reduction to the rhythmic foundation. This is helped. by developing a new instrument, the drum set, and its further development both in the Design and in the way how it is played. That concert - lecture is intended particularly for middle schools. In the year 2007 it forms part of the program Abecedaria of the ministries for education and culture of the junta de Andalucía.

Purpose

Due to the importance of the rhythm generally and the drums in particular in the today's music, the concert - lecture would like to represent an introduction to this area. The goal is it not only to know the individual parts, which form a drum set, but also to understand their specific function it in different music styles.

Development

- » - The classical inheritance: The snare drum, the bass drum and the cymbals. Their function in the classical music and in the military chapels. The rudimentals.
- » - The discovery of the drum set: The invention of the pedal and how to fit 3 instruments (bass drum, drum and Cymbals) in one. Bases of playing the drum set.
- » - The development towards the modern drum set: The equipment of the standard model. The accompaniment. The first drum solos. The difference between jazz and rock drumming.
- » - The drums being a complete instrument: The influence of the world music. The extension of the equipment and its use in the musical connection. The creation of sounds using different tools such as brushes, felt mallet, hands, finger, etc., and through varying the impact technology, changing the skin tension, beating the edge etc. The liberation from the purely rhythmic function. The drums as solo instrument.
- » - Electronics: The possibilities of sampling and the development of the electronic drums. The noise as sound.
- » - Concepts of the musical language and their application through a drum set: Wrong cadences, motive work, noise harmonies, development of melodies and counterpoint.
- » - Questions and answers

The concert - lecture takes one hour. In his course a complete drum set will be fitted together from the individual parts

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