

# WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH?

Concerts – Films – Workshop - Panels  
25 - 28 June 2009

Music is a universal language. Music is communication. Music is a monster.

There is good and bad music, in classical music, modern music, art music, serious music, contemporary music, electronic art music, experimental music, minimalist music, sacred music, commercial music, dance music, Minstrels, Gospel, Blues, Folk, R&B, folk music, country music, Rock, Pop, Jazz, Free Jazz, The New Thing, Improvised Music, Instant Composing, music that matters, world music, Punk, HipHop, Electronica, Indie, Metal, stage music, film music, cartoon-music, military music, entertainment music, easy listening, functional music, street music, national anthems, corporate anthems, and what not. There is music in sports (football, baseball, Olympic Games, etc.), in shopping malls, airplanes, public transport systems, fair grounds, coffee shops and restaurants. It is difficult to think of music-free zones in everyday life.

So there is music of major and minor significance, like serious music and easy listening, and there is funeral music. But what is the opposite of funeral music (besides Beethoven's Ode to Joy from his Symphony No. 9 serving nowadays as the anthem of the European Union and the Council of Europe)? Is there laughter and humour in music? Or, as Frank Zappa once put it: „Does Humour Belong in Music?“ What then tickles the funny bone?

There is no such thing as comical music. Because music is defined as an art form free of any tendencies, and the comical always pursues the goal of at least creating laughter.

However, this does not imply that composers, musicians, improvisers etc. have no sense of humour.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) for example was notorious for his elaborate sense of humour as expressed in his Symphony No. 94, popularly known as 'Surprise Symphony'.

Mozart (1756-1791) composed a sextet entitled 'Ein musikalischer Spaß' (A Musical Joke, aka: Peasant Music Sextet).

The former cabaret-pianist and composer Eric Satie (1866- 1925) wrote a composition in 1895 for piano named 'Vexations', which, as he noted, should be repeated 840 times. (It was John Cage who organized the first complete performance in 1963.) Satie also created pieces entitled 'Trois embryons desséchés' (Three dried embryo's), 'Trois morceaux en forme de poire à quatre mains' (Three pear-shaped pieces for four hands), 'Véritables préludes flasques (pour un chien)', (Truly flabby preludes [for a dog]), etc., which he asked to be performed "soft like an egg" and "like a nightingale with tooth-ache".

The musical wit of the American composer Charles Ives (1874-1954) is also widely acknowledged as demonstrated in his Symphony No. 2 which ends with a reveille bugle call.

A major influence on his peers and on later generations proved to be the American composer, arranger and pianist Carl Stalling, who composed the soundtracks to more than 600 funny cartoons over a span of 20 years (1938-1958) inventing a kind of kaleidoscopic music. He had access to a huge repertoire of sheet-music (owned by his employer Warner Bros.) comprising Pop, Jazz and classical music which he compiled (cut-and-paste), adding numerous unorthodox instruments and unusual sound effects. He set the tone for experimental music which adapted his methods and transformed them according to its needs. The musician John Zorn only recently confirmed the great influence of the cartoon soundtracks upon his own musical development.



## WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH?

Spike Jones was another landmark figure and inventor of a new music genre. He was a virtuoso, a visionary and an untiring precision-worker like Stalling and later on Frank Zappa. Spike Jones (1911-1965) started his career as a percussionist working for various radio shows before he established his own band in 1940: Spike Jones and His City Slickers. This constellation of high-class musicians became extraordinarily popular in a short period of time and topped the charts for almost 20 years. Jones' elaborate arrangements, his unusual, bizarre-grotesque instrumentation and the dynamic, absolutely perfect timing of his surreal musical pieces inspired a great number of artists, including the American actor, comedian and musician Ernie Kovacs, the English Comedy-Group Monty Python and their Flying Circus, as well as fluxus artists and musicians worldwide. The Spike Jones of the ensuing Rock 'n' Roll era was Frank Zappa. He too mastered the art of conceptual improvisation, and like Jones he managed to extract surprise and suspense for himself and the band out of each performance - no concert was played the same way twice. "He was no freak. He was a sharp analyzer of society and he knew how to incorporate his insights into his work. He created a unique and profound synthesis of American and European influences with what I call his Zappa-Dada technique" (Glenn Ferris, trombonist).

Edgar Varèse (1883-1965), the American composer and conductor of French descent became a major influence on Zappa (as for the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane and Soft Machine). Also Stravinsky, Bartók, Webern, Hauer, Krenek and Schönberg played an eminent role in his formative years. He absorbed the music of Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor and Eric Dolphy and studied Tibetan and Arabic music.

Zappa, whose life-long interest in graphic design, screenwriting and film direction is notorious (between 1971 and 1989 he realized 8 films of his own) knew exactly that the visual aspects of the stage performance played a key role in transporting his music („visual humour accompanied by music"). Throughout his life he tried to find an answer to the question which also interests us here, as his legendary performance in 1984 and his successive film released in 1985 proved: „Does Humour Belong In Music?"

In Steve Allen's Show of 1963 Zappa played on two bicycles (it was the bicycles which effected the invitation); in later years eminent conductors like Zubin Mehta, Pierre Boulez or Kent Nagano performed some of Zappa's orchestral works with the L.A. Philharmonic Orchestra, the Ensemble InterContemporain, and the London Symphony Orchestra. The fabulous Ensemble Modern based in Frankfurt am Main rehearsed and performed with Frank Zappa in September 1992 what was to become his last production: the concert-series 'The Yellow Shark', followed by the recording 'Ensemble Modern Plays Frank Zappa' (Greggery Peccary & Other Persuasions, released in 2002). Not unlike William S. Burroughs in 'Naked Lunch', Zappa persistently tried to unveil what's „floundering naked at the fork's end".

What Makes Music Laugh?



# WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH?

It flourishes with musical inventiveness, credibility, virtuosity, innovation, authenticity and open-mindedness. It needs the experience of the joy of playing (and the depths of despair), a perfect timing, the knowledge of how to conceive and carry out a performance (aural and visual architecture), and, last but not least, the dialogue with the public (creating 'compassionate listening'), which is needed to evolve a relational triangle between performer, co-performer and public to unleash the magic power of music.

Music aims at imagination, not at intuition. But we also know: „It is the imagination that nourishes the brains“ (J.G. Fichte).

In a treatise on historical philosophy from Nietzsche to Schlegel we read that „joy, cheerfulness, the liberation of all powers to freely interact, the unrestricted autonomy of a truly social life“ stipulated the birth of the comedy.

The Danish composer Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen confesses: „My dream is to unify asceticism with ecstasy.“ The Beat poets spoke of „matter in motion“. We speak of „music that matters“.

**„Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. Truth is not beauty. Beauty is not love. Love is not music. Music is the best“ (Frank Zappa).**

Many of the artists presented in this festival were not only trained and educated within the classical canon but also received a variety of inspiration and encouragement, at random or otherwise, through the artistic achievements of Dada, the surrealists, the sound-poets of the 50s and 60s, Karl Valentin, Ernst Jandl, the Marx Brothers, Spike Jones, Raymond Scott and Carl Stalling, Frank Zappa, Monty Python, Gerard Hoffnung, Victor Borge, the Situationists, the Libertarian and the Fluxus movements - not to mention the extra-European musical languages they encountered and the richness of local and regional cultural folk and tribal music traditions with their specific and widely varying styles which a younger generation recently seems to have re-discovered in their quest of the hitherto unknown (or rejected) characterized now as 'folklore imaginaire'.

„Of all the organs it is the ear that is the first to evolve and the last to die“, emphasizes composer and musician Peter Roth in Thomas Lühinger's film JOHLE UND WERCHE which we screen as a German premiere in the presence of its director and the Swiss yodeling-artists Annarosa Streiff and Kurt Annen. „This proves: Sound is, from the womb to the grave, an existential source of energy, like water and food.“

All of the music films which we show within the framework of WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH? are unique, opening up a universe of sounds and visuals, of background information and surprising insights which more than once will tickle our funny bone.

We have invited eminent artists from Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Israel and Germany to present their work at the festival - film directors, composers, musicians, performers.

This sparkling constellation of creative hearts and minds is quite unusual, polyphonic and challenging. This tour d'horizon comprising concerts, films and panels seeks to stimulate encounters and to explore the visual and aural range of current film and music production, of films and music that matter.



# WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH?

We thank all artists for their contribution and willingness to share their great expertise with us.

And of course we wish to thank everybody who has helped to make this festival possible:

Hauptstadtkulturfonds, Berlin Artists Programme/DAAD, the Academy of Fine Arts, David Meeker, M.B.E., Helge Leiberg, Horst Sommer, the Embassy of Switzerland, the Embassy of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Embassy of the State of Israel, Babylon, et al.

Helma Schleif

Berlin, May 2009

We greatly acknowledge the support of:



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# WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH?

## Programme

### The concerts:

Thursday 25 June | 19.30 Opening performance | Foyer

**Hans-Joachim Hespos** (composer) | **Stefan Eder** (performer) | Germany

An introduction to the art of musical surprise and wit, composed by the 'established outsider' Hans-Joachim Hespos and performed by Stefan Eder. Hespos created ANJOL in 2000 for conductor and noise slat.

Thursday 25 June | 20.00 Opening concert | Saal 1

**Vinko Globokar** (alphorn, trombone) | **Jean-Pierre Drouet** (drums, voice) | France

L'art pour l'homme en miniature, celebrated by two landmark composers and fervent improvisers who became household names in Europe and abroad – the quintessence in the art of duo performance.

Thursday 25 June | 21.30 | Concert | Saal 1

**Trio de clarinettes** (Armand Angster, Jean-Marc Foltz, Sylvain Kassap) | France

Angster, Foltz and Kassap are best known for performing contemporary composed music *and* for being fabulous improvising musicians. In trio they intrepidly cross borders and switch from composed to totally improvised material also incorporating folkloric traditions. The performance of these virtuosos is as electrifying as it is inspiring.

Friday 26 June | 19.30 | Concert | Saal 1

**Alex Nowitz** (tenor, counter-tenor, whistler, voice-artist, live electronics | composer) | Germany

"Studies for Self-Portrait is based on music I wrote in the past. I also record my own voice during the performance to be used as additional material. It's like looking into a mirror and drawing a self-portrait. According to the process of its creation the piece might never end" (AN).

Friday 26 June | 21.15 | Concert | Saal 1

**Mary Oliver** (violin/viola) | **Tobias Delius** (ts) | **Han Bennink** (dr) | The Netherlands

Three prominent members of Misha Mengelberg's ICP Orchestra in concert. A rare trio encounter whose interplay and performance is also visually quite spectacular. The former fluxus artist Han Bennink was awarded the European Jazz Prize in 2008.

Saturday 27 June | 19.30 | Concert | Saal 1

**Marilyn Mazur** (percussion) | Denmark

Danish Percussionist and composer Marilyn Mazur is an international star and one of the most prolific and versatile artists within her generation. She was a member of Miles Davis' group and has frequently collaborated with Gil Evans, Wayne Shorter and Jan Garbarek. Christian Braad Thomsen's absorbing film portrait MARILYN MAZUR-QUEEN OF PERCUSSION gives further insight into her life and work.

Saturday 27 June | 21.15 | Concert | Saal 1

**Harold Rubín** (clarinet, poetry) | Israel | **Alexander Frangenheim** (bass) | Germany

A sympathetic duo with the great Harold Rubín, doyen of the Israeli Improvising Music and art scene, and the Berlin-based bassist Alexander Frangenheim. Jasmine Kainy's portrait of Harold Rubín, MAGNIFICENT FAILURE, contains much valuable background information regarding his life, work and career in South Africa and Israel.

Sunday 28 June | 20.00 | oncert | Saal 1

**Sven-Åke Johansson** (dr, perc) | Sweden | Germany | **Christine Sehnaoui** (as) | France

The highly acclaimed Berlin-based Swedish drummer, free jazz pioneer and artist Sven-Åke Johansson and the Lebanese-French alto saxophonist Christine Sehnaoui have performed in duo for many years. This is their Berlin debut.

Sunday 28 June | 21.15 | Concert | Saal 1

**IG Blech** | Germany | Guests: Annarosa Streiff and Kurt Annen (yodeling) | Switzerland

Berlin's first World Music brass band – established 35 years ago – with a highly original repertoire of popular and political songs performed with passion and impressive proficiency. Two guest performers from Switzerland will join in with a yodeling intermezzo.



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## Programme

### Films:

Thursday 25 June | 17.00 | Film | Studio

**MUSIC IS A MONSTER. PELLE GUDMUNDSEN-HOLMGREEN** A film by Jytte Rex (Denmark 2007), 67 min.  
Producer Christian Braad Thomsen will be present for q/a.

Thursday 25 June | 22.45 | Film | Saal 1 | Repetition: Sunday 28 June | 22.30 | Saal 1

**THE SPIKE JONES STORY** A film by Don McGlynn (USA 1988) German premiere, 59 min.  
Director Don McGlynn will be present for q/a.

Friday 26 June | 17.00 | Film | Studio | Repetition: Saturday 27 June | 22.30 | Saal 1

**MAGNIFICENT FAILURE** A film by Jasmine Kainy (Israel 2008) European premiere, 61 min.  
Director Jasmine Kainy, protagonist Harold Rubin and film editor Tal Brog will be present for q/a.

Friday 26 June | 22.30 | Film | Saal 1 | Repetition: Sunday 28 June | 24.00 | Saal 1

**SUNNY 'S TIME NOW. PORTRAIT OF SUNNY MURRAY** A film by Antoine Prum (Luxembourg 2008), 106 min.  
Director Antoine Prum will be present for q/a, followed by a reception of the Embassy of Luxembourg.

Saturday 27 June | 17.00 | Film | Studio

**MARILYN MAZUR – QUEEN OF PERCUSSION** (Denmark 2006) A film by Christian Braad Thomsen, 71 min.  
Director Christian Braad Thomsen will be present for q/a.

Saturday 27 June | 22.30 | Film | Saal 1

**MAGNIFICENT FAILURE** A film by Jasmine Kainy (Israel 2008), 61 min.  
Director Jasmine Kainy, protagonist Harold Rubin and film editor Tal Brog will be present for q/a.

Sunday 28 June | 12.00 | Film | Studio

**FEMMES DU JAZZ/WOMEN IN JAZZ** A film by Gilles Corre (Frankreich 2000), 80 min.  
Director Gilles Corre will be present for q/a.

Sunday 28 June | 14.00 | Film | Studio

**THE SOUND OF GLARUS** A film by Mika Kaurismäki (Switzerland | Germany 2009), 50 min.  
Producer Uwe Dresch and the protagonists Annarosa Streiff and Kurt Annen will be present for q/a.

Sunday 28 June | 15.30 | Film | Studio

**HEIMATKLÄNGE: VOM JUCHZEN UND ANDEREN GESÄNGEN** A film by Stefan Schwietert (Germany | Switzerland 2007), 81 min.  
Director Stefan Schwietert and the Swiss yodeling-artists Annarosa Streiff and Kurt Annen will be present for q/a.

Sunday 28 June | 17.30 | Film | Studio

**JOHLE UND WERCHE / JODELN UND WERKEN** A film by Thomas Lüchinger (Switzerland 2008), 90 min.  
Director Thomas Lüchinger and the Swiss yodeling-artists Annarosa Streiff and Kurt Annen will be present for q/a.

Sunday 28 June | 22.30 | Film | Saal 1

**THE SPIKE JONES STORY** A film by Don McGlynn (USA 1988), 59 min.  
Director Don McGlynn will be present for q/a.

Sunday 28 June | 24.00 | Film | Studio

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# WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH?

## Programme

### Panels:

Friday 26 June | 14.30 – 15.30 | Oval | Panel 1: WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH?

Saturday 27 June | 14.30 – 15.30 | Oval | Panel 2: WHAT MAKES MUSIC LAUGH?

Participants: film directors, composers, musicians, journalists, including **Carl-Ludwig Reichert** (writer, musician, radio moderator), **Wolfgang Seidel** (drummer of Ton Steine Scherben, author), **Mary Oliver** (composer, musician), **Harold Rubin** (artist, musician), **Christian Braad Thomsen** (film director, producer, writer), **Don McGlynn** (film director, producer), **Hans-Joachim Hespos** (composer), **Annarosa Streiff** and **Kurt Annen** (yodeler).

Chaired by Max Dax (chief editor of SPEX, author) Panel 1

Chaired by Jacek Slaski (programme editor of TIP magazine, writes for Rolling Stone a.o.) Panel 2

### Schedule Yodeling-Workshop:

Thursday 25 June 12.00 – 14.00 | Oval

Friday 26 June | 11.00 – 14.00 | Oval

Saturday 27 June | 11.00 – 14.00 | Oval

Sunday 28 June | 11.00 – 13.00 | Foyer

with Annarosa Streiff und Kurt Annen (Switzerland)

### Entrance-fee:

Festivalpass for all concerts and films: € 100,00

Day ticket (for all concerts and films of the day): € 30,00

Single ticket concert: € 12,00

Single ticket film: € 6,50

**Registration fee for yodeling-workshop:** € 80,00

(including free tickets for the films THE SOUND OF GLARUS, HEIMATKLÄNGE and JOHLE UND WERCHE)

### Panels:

Friday 26 June and Saturday 27 June | 14.30 – 15.30: Admission free

### Ticket sale:

Tickets available in advance at Babylon ([www.babylonberlin.de](http://www.babylonberlin.de))

### Ticket reservation | Registration yodeling-workshop | Infos | Accreditation:

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