

in a framing that made it relevant to contemporary ears, were a significant curatorial feat for the artistic director.

The second concert, “Storytelling for Earthly Survival,” consisted, among other aspects, of a screening of a documentary on Donna Haraway, as well as readings related to her work, a performance by Alvin Lucier, and a documentary on artists inspired by Haraway’s writing. The lack of traditionally musical performances makes it difficult to call it a concert, and Polzer himself refers to it instead as one of his “composed evenings.” This is also notable in that the evening presented a large amount of material from a variety of artistic backgrounds, raising the question of its relationship to a music festival. The answer is in Polzer’s characterization of the evening as “composed,” in that he uses his musical sensibility to juxtapose heterogeneous materials into a composed whole. While the individual parts may not be explicitly musical, save for Lucier’s performance, it is argued that Polzer creates an event based on a musical, compositional logic, but that is not explicitly related to only specifically sounds. In this way, the composed evening is shown to be an important building block of Polzer’s approach, in that his approach to programming the music festival is focused more on creating a specific experience in time than on putting together individual musical works.

5.2 A Brief Prehistory to the Maerzmusik Festival

5.2.1 The Berliner Festspiele

While the Berliner Festwochen would themselves run yearly from 1951 up until 2003, the institution itself would expand and contract repeatedly over the years of its operation until taking on the shape it does today under its current name, the Berliner Festspiele. The following section will briefly detail this genealogy in order to be able to best contextualize the institutional landscape in which the current Maerzmusik festival takes place, the ultimate subject of this chapter.

In 1967, the original Berliner Festwochen would go on to found Berliner Festspiele GmbH (note the plural of Festspiel), expanding to include three other festivals with which it had been associated over its history, while continuing the Festwochen under the same name. These were the Filmfestspiele (later known as the Berlinale), which had also taken place for the first time in 1951, the Theatertreffen, founded in 1964 and known then as the Berliner Theaterwettbewerb, and the Berliner Jazztage, originally a part of the Berliner Festwochen in 1964 with a thematic focus on Africa, and later spun out into its own festival (Berliner Festspiele 1998, 32–36).

As of 1990, the Berliner Festspiele GmbH took over trusteeship of the festival known then as the Musik-Biennale Berlin (note the Italian spelling, once again in

reference to Venice) following the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic (Berliner Festspiele 1998, 106). As of its 2002 edition, this festival would be renamed to Maerzmusik Berlin, and take place annually rather than biennially. This will be discussed more in the next section. In 2001, the Berliner Festspiele finally moved into a new, permanent home, taking over the former Theater der Freien Volksbühne, a modernist theatre built in 1963 in West Berlin (Berliner Festspiele 2011a). The new building would be the site for many, but not all, activities of the Berliner Festspiele, including the Theatertreffen, and the Maerzmusik festival.

Beginning in 2001, and finalized in 2002, the Berliner Festspiele was formally reorganized into a new organization, Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin (KBB) (Federal cultural events in Berlin). This saw a fusion with the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures), and the Berliner Festspiele assuming responsibility for the Gropiusbau building as well. This new organization transitioned ownership of these institutions from the state of Berlin to the federal government, with the latter as its sole shareholder. Joachim Sartorius would lead this new Berliner Festspiele as of 2001 until 2011, with Thomas Oberender taking over in 2012.

Under Sartorius' directorship, a number of festivals and series were initiated, though not all continue on until today. Perhaps most notably, the Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin (Berlinale) separated itself in 2002 from this new joint organization to become independent. The Berliner Festwochen, with their traditional focus on mainly classical music, would continue under his leadership as of 2005 under the new title of Musikfest Berlin (Berliner Festspiele 2011b, inside rear cover).

The Berliner Festspiele today consists of what it on its website considers to be eight discrete areas. The first is the Gropiusbau, added, as mentioned, in 2001, and a site mainly for archaeological, historical, and contemporary art exhibitions. Second are a series of federal competitions such as Theatertreffen der Jugend, meant to promote the next generation of cultural producers in various strategic areas. Third and newest is the Immersion Program, a series of events both in the venues of the Berliner Festspiele, as well as in other venues around Berlin, dealing with installative and immersive art experiences, and addressing issues of digitalization in society. Fourth is Jazzfest Berlin, which still takes places yearly both at the Festspielhaus and in other venues in the city. Fifth is Maerzmusik, which will be addressed in greater depth later. Sixth is Musikfest Berlin, the continuation of the original Berliner Festwochen. Seventh is the Theatertreffen, which invites theatre productions from all over the world (but mainly from the German-speaking countries) to present during the festival every summer. Finally, eighth is made up of the various formats in its Immersion program, started in 2016. (Berliner Festspiele n.d.–a)

5.2.2 Musik-Biennale Berlin

The current-day Maerzmusik festival can be said to have its furthest origins in the Musik-Biennale Berlin, an international music festival organized by the German Democratic Republic. It was founded in 1967 already bearing the biennale title that would imply its continuation, and was a continuation and expansion of the 1965 Festtage zeitgenössischer Musik which took place in 1965 also in Berlin (Archiv Verband der Komponisten, File 347). Until the collapse of the GDR, the Biennale would be run and managed by a committee from the Verband der Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler der DDR (Association of the composers and musicologists of the GDR) (*ibid.*).

Without overstating elements of continuity between the GDR-era festival and today, it is nevertheless interesting to observe the way in which some of the same aspects of music festivals in general are maintained, and even some latent components still acting on the current editions of the Maerzmusik festival.

Concept of the GDR-Era Biennale

According to a folio produced by the organization entitled “Information über Konzeption und Vorbereitung der Musik-Biennale Berlin vom 4. bis 12. März 1967” (Information regarding conception and preparation of the music biennale Berlin from 4 to 12 March 1967), the Biennale strove to be a recurring festival with international reach, as well as one that differentiated itself from similar festivals in the West through its emphasis on the promotion of a socialist musical agenda (Archiv Verband der Komponisten, File 347). This was understood to be the biennale’s main point of distinction to other festivals happening both within socialist countries, naming specifically Warsaw Autumn and Biennale Zagreb, as well as those major festivals in West Germany, Donaueschingen and Darmstadt (*ibid.*). The goal was to achieve an overview of current musical trends happening internationally across a variety of genres, including music theatre, symphonic works, chamber music, but also now more dated formats like political lieder.

Internationality

The Musik-Biennale Berlin emphasized the importance of its internationality as one of its main attractions. While the goal was naturally to bring together the best works of composers from socialist countries, an explicit goal was also the programming of certain works from capitalist countries, including West Germany.

Returning briefly to the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London as a comparison, that grand event sought to bring its Victorian-era citizens the finest gems (quite literally) from British colonies and trading partners around the globe. So too though did the Musik-Biennale search for the greatest “compositional gems” from (mostly)

among the socialist countries, in order to bring them back to Berlin and present an *overview* of developments from across the world of musical composition.

Common to both is the tendency for their concept of the “world” that the festival implies in its internationality to be strongly informed by their respective historical and ideological realities: The 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition featured an Indian diamond taken under conspicuous circumstances from that colony as one of its major attractions, a chance to see the spoils of that country’s colonial legacy so entwined with British history. Similarly, the internationality of the Musik-Biennale for instance in 1967 focused on works by composers from the GDR, USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and Hungary, and Yugoslavia—the countries that made up the “international” of the socialist worldview. However, the Musik-Biennale also presented from West Germany, Brazil, England, Italy, Mexico, and the USA, meaning that the ideological agenda of the festival was not enforced through exclusion from programming alone (though this took place as well), but rather through a mechanism of juxtaposition.

Therefore, though taking place ideologically within a socialist country, and funded by the state, it is remarkable to observe the festival’s relationship to internationality fitting right in with how it has been discussed in Chapter 1, namely as an affirmation of self through the presentation of self in relation to others. Here as earlier, the internationality of a festival does not just include those closest strategic partners, rather it also seeks to define oneself in relief to one’s neighbours and ideological opponents, in particular West Germany. In this way, internationality and plurality become a paradoxical means for nationalism in the deployment of the festival format.

March Music

The first Musik-Biennale Berlin took place between 4 and 12 March, 1967 (Archiv Verband der Komponisten, File 347). Over the course of the biennale’s run during the GDR, it would thereafter generally take place over the last two weekends in February. The festival normally ran for 10 days—beginning on a Friday night, continuing through the following week, and presenting a final concert on the following Sunday night (*ibid.*).

After the fall of the wall, and the festival’s subsumption into the Berliner Festspiele as of 1990, it would shift slightly later, and settle on mid-March (but until 2002 still be branded as the Musik-Biennale Berlin), maintaining generally the same 10-day length. Ten days in the middle of March would thus become the usual length of the festival that has been maintained ever since, and which has now been formalized in the title, Maerzmusik (lit. March music).

5.2.3 Historical Trauma and the Post-Reunification Musik-Biennale Berlin

Heike Hoffmann would take over leadership of the Musik-Biennale as of its first edition in 1991 in a post-reunification Germany. She would then go on to lead the festival for the next decade, until finally handing it over to Matthias Osterwold as of the 2002 edition (this being also the moment of its name change to “Maerzmusik” and its shift to a yearly rhythm). On the occasion of her final festival in 2001, she reflects in her introductory text on her programming strategies, writing that in the past decade, the music biennale has focused on mostly one topic, the processing of 40 years of separated music history in East and West (Hoffmann 2001, 7). This was realized by Hoffmann and others mainly via programming choices, and attempting to present important composers and works from both sides of the formerly-divided country.

The first biennale post-reunification, its 13th edition, would take place between 14 and 24 February, 1991. In the festival’s introduction by then-director of the Berliner Festspiele, Ulrich Eckhardt, he frames it strongly within the context of these struggles (also cultural) of a newly-reunited city, positioning the biennale as an opportunity to write a new, unified history of the 40 years of musical development on either side of the wall as a precursor and foundation for a new German society (Eckhardt 1991, 3). Significant here is both the focus on understanding how the two divergent musical canons could be unified, as well as an intense focus on the split past. Of note is also the branding continuity of the biennale, naming it the city’s 13th, despite this drastic change. In terms of programming, the 13th biennale edition would mix important works and composers from both former East and West in various combinations. Much of the planning having already been completed by the Verband Deutscher Komponisten, it would be as of the 1993 edition of the festival that its programming would change more significantly to reflect its newfound position.

Between 1993 and 1999, so between the 14th and 17th editions of the biennale, the attempt at rewriting a unified German music history would be scrupulously followed by Hoffman and others. Evidence of this can be seen in the hefty, four-volume work entitled *Neue Musik im geteilten Deutschland* (New Music in separated Germany) commissioned by the biennale and published volume by volume over four biennales starting in 1993. Compiled and commented on by Ulrich Dibelius and Frank Schneider, the immense work systematically collected primary documents such as correspondence, newspaper clippings, book excerpts, etc. from both East and West on the various musical developments of note occurring there. Each volume was assigned a decade beginning with the 1950s and continuing onto the 1980s, thus spanning effectively the entirety of divided German music history. The volumes themselves give the impression of a careful act of stitching back together a torn history, for each topic presenting first documents from the West then from

the East, and finally a commentary putting it all into perspective (see Dibelius and Schneider 1993; 1995; 1997; 1999).

The historical re-stitching did not just take place in print, but was enacted also through biennale programming in the corresponding festival years. This meant that the 1993 biennale focused on works deemed of historical significance from both East and West from the 1950s, the 1995 biennale focused on the 1960s, etc. until the treatment of the 1980s in the 1999 biennale.

Putting this into a wider perspective, in section 2.2.2, both established and newly-created post-WWII biennales for the visual arts were shown to make a programmatic shift away from an emphasis on achieving an “overview” of international trends and establishing a narrative about interrelations between national and international art practice. Instead, they began to experiment with their structure, working to establish the conditions for knowledge-production that created alternatives to this colonialist/modernist approach. These, ideally, would be spaces where the entanglements of various strands of history would be able to be teased apart in their complexity, and with the searcher as themselves also contained within that network. Another tendency was to establish biennales in embattled and damaged places, using art as a way to “exorcise political traumas” (Martínez quoted in Rocés 2010, 53). While Rocés argues that these attempts often did not fully manage to resist the tendency towards a linear/modernist approach to understanding lineages and histories, they nevertheless represented attempts at breaking free from this straightjacket (53–54).

Hoffmann’s Musik-Biennales at the Berliner Festspiele in the wake of reunification were certainly set in a site of historical trauma, and to that extent bore a point of comparison to the visual arts biennales in similar sites mentioned by Rocés. Her approach to biennale leadership was one that sought to reunite a divided music history through attempts at recreating a common past. Observing from afar, this approach, though one in the spirit of emancipation, suggests a repetition of the modernist festival principle, namely a reimagining of a singular past in search of a path into the future. Maximal effort seems to have been devoted to “unification” of music history into a singular narrative stretching posthumously into the past. A biennale, with its modernist penchant for storytelling and for (re)asserting values in times of crisis, is an ideal site for this historical revision to take place. The decade of post-reunification biennales focused on 40 years of separation, performing and thus realizing a singular music historical narrative. The festival structure, 10 days of concerts consisting of discrete pieces made by trained composers, was not called into question, nor more significantly was the constitution of the particular music-aesthetic paradigm itself challenged on a fundamental historical level. Rather, the canon seems to have been adapted to suit a new political reality.

Just as the objects on display in the white cube are placed in relief against a neutral background with which they do not interact, so too did the festival itself

seemingly not allow for interaction with the hard facts of its organization and basic set of assumptions.

Therefore, despite its similarity to other biennales established in disputed zones, it significantly attempts to consolidate two divergent histories under a new, singular, privileged gaze. The post-reunification Musik-Biennale can thus be said to have attempted to mend a divided cultural history, though without reflecting on how its fundamental structural constitution was a product of that same history.

5.3 Maerzmusik 2002-2014

From 2002 until 2014, Matthias Osterwold would serve as artistic director of the Maerzmusik festival. The beginning of his tenure would also mark the launch of this new festival, starting in 2002, as the successor to the Musik-Biennale Berlin, which had begun in the German Democratic Republic, and been put on by the Berliner Festspiele as of 1991 due to the state's collapse. The festival would be centred at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, but worked consistently together with a varied group of other important Berlin cultural institutions. Among them were such prominent institutions as Radialsystem V, Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg Platz, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the Hamburger Bahnhof, among many others.

Already somewhat discernable in this list of institutions was the emphasis that Osterwold placed on the festival programing a wide spectrum of musical practices and formats. This would include everything from new and historical orchestra and chamber works, to small experiments, music theatre, crossovers between music and visual arts, as well as electronic music, all in ever-changing combinations. For instance, during the first festival in 2002, the first Saturday evening was dedicated to a massive presentation of installations and compositions by, or inspired by, John Cage at Funkhaus Berlin, the former East German radio studios south-east of the city (Berliner Festspiele 2002, 104).

The festival also as of 2003 began a format that it called the Sonic Arts Lounge, in the Ticket Hall of the Haus der Berliner Festspiele. The format was conceived of as the “late night” offering of the festival, with concerts beginning as of 22h. The format was an attempt at exploring the interrelationships of avantgarde music, sound art, and club culture, all of which had rich communities in the city (Berliner Festspiele 2003, 196).

There was also a constant and very prominent emphasis on the programming of music from a variety of countries and regions that do not normally get as much focus as those major Western centres that much of CCM's history has focused on. This initiative focused for instance on China (2002), the Balkans (2003), Mexico (2008), or on Russia, Armenia, and Central Asia (2009). Osterwold would invite