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“[...] THAT EVERY CONCERT [...] BECOMES A BORDERLINE EXPERIENCE” – MATTHIAS KRANEBITTER (BLACK PAGE ORCHESTRA)



(c) Black Page Orchestra

July 22, 2021 / [contemporary music](https://www.musicexport.at/category/contemporary-music/) (<https://www.musicexport.at/category/contemporary-music/>),
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The [BLACK PAGE ORCHESTRA](https://www.musicexport.at/artist/black-page-orchestra/) (<https://www.musicexport.at/artist/black-page-orchestra/>) is a heterogeneous ensemble for contemporary music based in Vienna. Its repertoire is largely made up of compositions by the younger generation. They are often aesthetically radical works that take a confrontational course, attacking our perception and reflecting on society and our surroundings in the process. In an interview with Shilla Strelka, artistic director MATTHIAS KRANEBITTER explains how much willingness to be uninhibited this requires, what problems not wanting to compromise entails and what is so appealing about pushing the boundaries at the same time.

The Black Page Orchestra has been in existence for seven years now. How did it all start?

Matthias Kranebitter: I had the idea for my own ensemble after returning from my studies in the Netherlands. At that time I felt the need to found an ensemble because I missed a lot of current compositional positions in Viennese music.

You were quickly able to win over some people for the idea. Who was involved from the beginning?

Matthias Kranebitter: They were Alessandro Baticci, [Alfredo Ovalles](https://www.musicexport.at/artist/alfredo-ovalles/) (<https://www.musicexport.at/artist/alfredo-ovalles/>), whom I met at the first concert, Florian Fennesz, with whom I had already done a lot, and Igor Grosz. Mirela Ivičević was also there at the beginning with curatorial ideas.

In the meantime, the ensemble has grown to 23 musicians, some of whom come from very different contexts and musical genres.

Matthias Kranebitter: Yes, I think that's important too! I have gathered people from the musical scene whom I find interesting and good. I think a good musician is intelligent, has a wide variety of interests and is also active in different areas.



Matthias Kranebitter (c) Igor Ripak

For example?

Matthias Kranebitter: There are people like Alfredo, who still plays in a Latin jazz combo, or Florian, who plays a lot in jazz and pop projects, Alessandro with his hundreds of projects, Fani [*Vovoni; note*], who also plays ancient music. No musician is active only in the *Black Page Orchestra*.

I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO GIVE A SOUND BODY A CLEAR DIRECTION

How does the selection of pieces work? Do you vote democratically?

Matthias Kranebitter: No, there are always suggestions and ideas from the musicians, but in the end I take the final decision. I think it's important to give a body of music a clear direction. But the musicians have a say and I'm happy when people get involved. Of course, there are also various wishes of promoters and sponsors to take into account, but in any case I want to convey a clear aesthetic profile of the ensemble to the audience.

Alexander Schubert - Serious Smile



You deliberately concentrate on the younger generation of composers?

Matthias Kranebitter: Yes, because that is what touches me, what moves me and what I feel is up-to-date. I try to find pieces that have something special.

What do you mean by that?

Matthias Kranebitter: The main aspect is the aesthetic approach, which means that there is a sound that I didn't know before. Sometimes there are also technical aspects or conceptual backgrounds. That often makes it quite challenging in the course of the concert, because each piece has its own technical subtleties. Even if these are only small details, it is logistically almost not manageable in the overall set of six to seven pieces. But so far, it has all worked out.

I'VE NEVER KNOWN ANYONE TO REACH HIS OR HER LIMITS

When you choose works, do you have to know what the musicians are capable of? After all, these are very demanding compositions that require a great deal.

Matthias Kranebitter: Yes, although we don't really make any compromises in that respect. The selection is really made purely on the basis of the piece. I have no reservations at all about the musicians. I have never experienced anyone who has reached his or her limits. And if they do, then it might be the limits of what can be played and of the instrument itself. But it is a different matter when it comes to pieces that work with performance elements. There, the musicians have to do something else outside of their instrument, which means that I at least am trying to think in advance about who could do it. Performing, speaking, is not a matter of fact for anyone. It is also not part of the training. But there are always pieces that require performative skills. In the meantime, however, we have doubled each instrument, so that one can already make a selection.

Fausto Romitelli - Professor Bad Trip: Lesson 1



Multimedia arrangements are central to the repertoire of the *Black Page Orchestra*. The ensemble sometimes becomes a projection screen for videos or is exposed to strobe flashes. What is it like for the ensemble to be challenged on so many sensory levels?

Matthias Kranebitter: We would have to ask the musicians themselves. I remember at the time of the performance in the Arena, a few of them complained about the fog machine. That's not the first thing they thought of when they were studying music: that they had to play the clarinet in the fog. I mean, yes, it's certainly more challenging. In David Bird's piece it certainly wasn't so easy to play with those constant flashes of light either; or wearing masks, as in the performance with Stirn Prumzer, that didn't please everyone either. But that's part of it.

[E]VERY EVENTUALLY EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE

It's challenging for the audience as well. I feel like you guys are trying to shake things up with the pieces. They are often very ecstatic, stirring compositions. What appeals to you about that?

Matthias Kranebitter: Of course, my ideal would be that every concert of ours becomes a borderline experience. After all, music with artistic pretensions is not a narcotic, but an expansion of consciousness, the sharpening of the senses and perception through an eventually existential experience.

Many of the compositions you perform integrate newer technology. How curious do the musicians have to be?

Matthias Kranebitter: There are technologies around that challenge them in the way they play, but each and every one of us also has to constantly learn new tools in everyday life that he or she has to use in the digital realm. That's something you can also ask for when making music. It was never the case that someone said, no, I won't do that. There was, for example, the Concertino by Georgy Dorokhov that we played in Carinthia, which is radically destructive because the soloist saws and drills into the violin, hammers nails into it and finally destroys it completely. But all this happens in terms of sound and musical expression, which is why I find the piece so exciting. There were discussions and not only goodwill among the musicians of the ensemble. But yes, the musicians themselves must also be curious.

You play in such different places as the *Vienna Musikverein* or the *Arena Wien*. But one of the most special places was probably a submarine harbour in Vis, Croatia. How did that come about?

Matthias Kranebitter: On Vis there are heaps of military installations that are abandoned. They are not closed off, you can go anywhere. And this submarine tunnel, you can't miss it when you're on this island. It's very spectacular, also in terms of the acoustics. You have water and a round vault made of concrete. The sound is in there. At that time we wanted to record a video for "Mikrophonie 1" by Karlheinz Stockhausen and I immediately thought this would be the perfect place.

David Bird - Drop



When you say spectacular location – you generally have no reservations about spectacular arrangements.

Matthias Kranebitter: Yes, exactly. It's not about a superficial spectacle, the works have more content than just flashing lights. At least I'm trying to select the pieces so that they are built on a foundation and they aren't just fireworks.

But if you use Intonarumori, as you did recently, then they are also more ...

Matthias Kranebitter: ... spectacular?

Yes. How did you get to play them?

Matthias Kranebitter: Filippo Perocco, an Italian composer, rebuilt them and we were allowed to use them. We're not just doing it because of the instruments, but because it has a historical relevance, especially in connection with Stockhausen. There is an aesthetic line with the Futurists, who were really looking for a new world of sound, who wanted to break with tradition, and the early electronic musicians after the Second World War. "Microphonie" is very similar in nature.

Karheinz Stockhausen's Mikrophonie 1 (full version) // Black Page ...



Is Stockhausen's "Mikrophonie" the only really older piece in your repertoire?

Matthias Kranebitter: We'll do Xenakis next year, finally! But yes, Stockhausen and Mosolov's "Eisengießerei", which is early Russian avant-garde, are the only 20th century works we have played so far.

IT'S JUST ABOUT THE ENERGY LEVEL

How would you describe the sound of the *Black Page Orchestra*?

Matthias Kranebitter: The important thing is that the musicians are uninhibited and capable of violent outbursts. It's simply about the energy level. It is also an advantage that the musicians – especially if they come from such different backgrounds as jazz or improv – have no inhibitions. This is perhaps different with musicians who have classical training only, and who are sometimes reserved because their intention is to have complete control of the instrument sounds.

Kaj Duncan David - micro .: micro : micro .:: micro .:::



They really can't be restrained with the *Black Page Orchestra*. What other ensemble musicians put on make-up before every performance?

Matthias Kranebitter: That was not my idea! That was the musicians' idea. I would never force anyone to put on make-up. No, it was completely spontaneous. At the first concert, I think Alessandro had a make-up box with him. And then we kept it up.

SOMETIMES THEY ARE ALSO TOO GOOD-HUMOURED FOR ME!

It sounds like you guys are having a lot of fun.

Matthias Kranebitter: Yes! We do. I noticed that too. I always thought that was the case with all ensembles. But that's not true. I don't know why that is. It just happens. Sometimes they are too good-humoured for me!

You are also a composer. Could it be that the *Black Page Orchestra* interprets your pieces in the most accurate manner?

Matthias Kranebitter: Of course I know the musicians in the *Black Page Orchestra* best, and they know me best as well. This human closeness naturally offers advantages in our collaboration. We share many – musical – views and, I think, often have a similar understanding of the material. It certainly always depends on the composition, but if I definitely am writing a piece for the *Black Page Orchestra* – like “Combative Music and it's Algorithmic Demystification” – then it's certainly in the best hands of this ensemble for the time being.

Is there actually a permanent conductor for the ensemble?

Matthias Kranebitter: No.

Is that an advantage or a disadvantage?

Matthias Kranebitter: I think it's good! There are different people we are working with and it's also refreshing for the musicians.

You founded the *Black Page Orchestra* at the same time as the *Unsafe+Sounds Festival*?

Matthias Kranebitter: On the same day, in the same hour.

What was the idea behind it?

Matthias Kranebitter: The question was: If we as an ensemble organise our first concert – who will come? We didn't want to address only the typical new music audience. That stimulated networking with the University of Applied Arts and the club scene. I think you can achieve networking through larger contexts.



Matthias Kranebitter (c) Igor Ripak

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far in working with the ensemble?

Matthias Kranebitter: The biggest challenges have actually always been concerts in places where concerts don't normally take place, such as in the aforementioned submarine harbour. Playing an electronic music concert when the place doesn't even have electricity is quite challenging. But it definitely makes the experience more intense and actually more fun.

But challenging was also our concert at the Zagreb Music Biennale in April at lockdown times – travelling from one lockdown in one country to another lockdown in another country and back again. There were a lot of bureaucratic hurdles and additional paperwork and we didn't know until the very end whether it would work at all.

How were you otherwise last year? You were able to perform a few times despite Covid. In October there was a cooperation with *Unsafe+Sounds*, where Katharina Ernst, Bernhard Lang, Oyvind Torvund and Alexander Schubert performed. Then there was the *Music Biennale* in Zagreb with Ivičević and Schubert on the programme. You also played at the *Radiokulturhaus* ...

Matthias Kranebitter: ... yes. Then there was the "Geiselooper" by Samu Gryllus, which is about a failed hostage situation in Hungary in the 1970s and how it was dealt with in the authoritarian Hungarian system at the time. It will be played three more times at the *WUK* in autumn and in Budapest. And then there was the concert at the *Musikverein* with the *Intonarumori*, the futuristic noise makers by Luigi Russolo. In June we had another small performance at the *WOW!Signal Festival* in Steinergerasse, and on July 1 we will play a new programme in Milan. In August we are at *impuls* in Graz and in September at the *Gaudeamus Music Week* in Utrecht. Then in October *musikprotokoll* in Graz. And on 21 October our cycle starts at the *Musikverein* on 21 October.

You perform at *impuls* in Graz and are the ensemble in residency there. What is planned?

Matthias Kranebitter: Yes, exactly. We will perform our repertoire and then we will also interpret some compositions by students who have applied for a call. Then there is also a project with François Sarhan, a composer who teaches there. That will certainly be an exciting collaboration. The previous works I know of him are very performative and theatrical pieces, almost works subject to directing, like in the theatre. The starting point for this new work is his acoustic diary, a collection of various audio recordings that he has assembled together into sound collages. He calls them logbooks. Based on this, we will work with him on a performance lasting about an hour.

Thank you very much for the interview!

Shilla Strelka

Dates:

Wednesday, 18 August 2021, Mumuth, Graz, [impuls Academy \(https://www.musicexport.at/impuls-festival-2021/\)](https://www.musicexport.at/impuls-festival-2021/)

Friday, 27 August 2021, Mumuth, Graz, impuls Academy

Saturday, 11 September 2021, Pandora, Utrecht, Gaudeamus Music Week

Sunday, 12 September 2021, Tivoli Vredenburg, Utrecht, Gaudeamus Music Week

Friday, 8 October 2021, musikprotokoll, Graz

Monday, 18 October 2021, openmusic, Graz

Thursday, 21 October 2021, Musikverein, Vienna

Links:

[Black Page Orchestra \(Website\) \(https://www.blackpageorchestra.org/\)](https://www.blackpageorchestra.org/)

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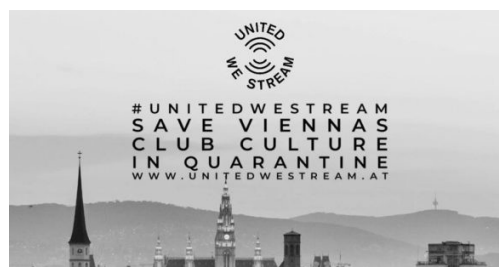
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FEATURED VIDEO

Christian De Lellis & Fausta - Tu sei mia (Mano nella mano) Offiziell...



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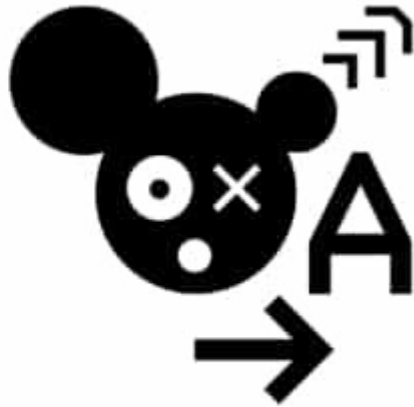


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