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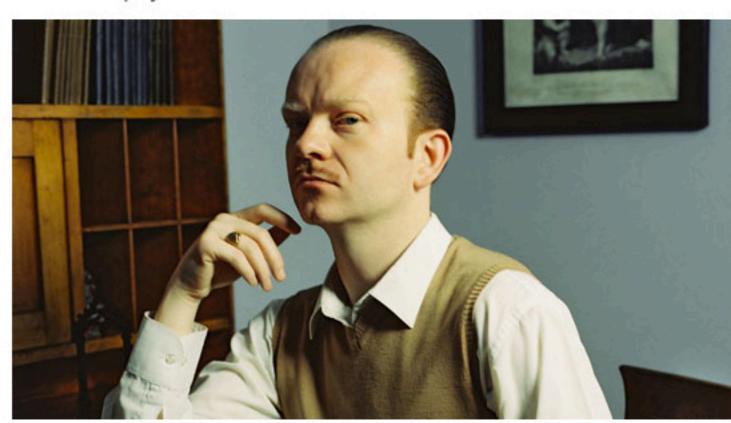
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Ode to Musical Conservatism

Q&A with Atom™ by Glissando magazine

CTM partner Glissando magazine caught up with Uwe Schmidt ahead of his CTM.13 appearances as Atom™, where the prolific artist will present two of his latest collaborative projects.



Jacek Plewicki (Glissando): Are your various projects consistent or contradictory? Is there some true self of Uwe Schmidt?

Uwe Schmidt: Initially, when I began to make music, and I realized how many different musical codes there actually exist and how vast my field of interest would become, I thought that many of the works I did were opposite poles of the same thing. Just until recently, when I started to remaster my entire calalogue, which spans 20 years and approximately 2000 tracks, I realized that every single track, looking at the time line of productions, made perfect sense with the track done "before" and "after". Somehow, looking at them as ONE flow of creative output, they all seem to follow the same idea, even though they may appear as opposite musical ideas. In that sense I now believe, that in fact it's a very consistent overall set of works.

JP: Is seriousness a necessary step in performing club/electronic/easy listening music?

US: Not sure what you mean with "seriousness"...

The way I interprete it, you mean seriousness as in "responsability", in a sense that what you do should not be done light hearted. If so, then, yes, I think that seriousness is an important thing. That said, I would not restrict it to the type of music I do, but in fact, to ANY profession, craft or vocation. Or, as the "hagakure" the book of the samurai says: "Negligence is an extreme thing". It also states: "By inconsistency and frivolity we stray from the Way and show ourselves to be beginners. In this we do much harm."

That said, one should have a smile on his face doing so.

JP: What's your relation to the thing you call a "musical conservatism"?

US; I refer to as "conservatism", not only in music, but in any craft or art, a set of parameters or rules which turn out to be universal. In that sense, "universal" means "correct under any circumstance". Most importantly to me, this automatically excludes all sort of parameters which are "fashion" related or merely a result of contemporary experimentation or hypes. The longer I have been making music, and the more "hypes" and "fashions" I have seen, the more I come to the conclusion that underneath all that, there lays a universal set of parameters and tools, which, independent from it's contemporary fluctuations, keeps functioning as the foundation of everything I do. This observation I would strictly not even call "conservativism", since the latter term comes with a certain political implication I don't really mean to deal with.

Apart from that position, when talking sociological- or political about "conservative" patterns, I indeed believe that such term, in nowadays societies, does not any longer have the meaning we thought it would have. In fact "conservative" and "progressive" are both positions that can mean its opposite, depending on the context. I did consider my work with "Sr. Coconut" for example as a consciously "conservative" work, especially when comparing it to the so-called "progressive" musical tendencies at that time, which I always considered conservative in its core.

Looking at it closely, a project considered conservative, such as "Sr. Coconut" or "Pop Artificielle" (which incorporated "cover versions" in a moment they were not really in fashion) have turned out to be more progressive than many other musical productions labelled "advanced" in the very same historical moment. Therefore, what's "conservative" or "progressive", just as it is with politics, is nothing else but a label one puts over a subject or object which then works as a sales point on a psychological level. What that subject or object really is, often unveils itself in a different moment and may be the opposite to the proclaimed position. If you would ask me "conservative or progressive" I would always respond "conservative" (yet not in a political sense), simply because it guarantees a higher level of quality and scares the hipsters away.



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JP: You're described as the guy who created a lot of new aesthetics. Isn't this some kind of a suck-up towards musical journalists or maybe there's some irony underneath it all?

US; That's an interesting question, since you imply that I may have invented such statement ("The guy who invented a lot of new aesthetics..."), while the truth is, that I have never ever used such definition or made such statement myself...l just make the music! Fact is, that the statement you quoted was invented by the very same journalists, who usually need to fill the rather abstract area of music with something else: words! So, next to the "descriptive" sort of journalists, there is the other type which tries to imply, in this case my music and oeuvre, a meta-discourse of some sort.

Truth is, that my real discourse is abstract – it's musical. This, by its nature, comes without irony and without a huge theory behind it. Doing many different sorts of music and wanting to deal with a variety of aesthetics, styles, cultures, languages...codes...is a very natural and finally practical thing, nourished by a creative urge. That's basically it. One may, or may not, give it a bigger meaning, put it in a sociological- or historical context, which is all fine with me and long term may contan certainly some sort of truth, yet am I not the person to address or to call responsible for what appears in the media ABOUT me. It may be useful to remember, that the object that appears in the media, and the object itself are two different things. Further, and as a conclusion of that, at a very, very early stage of my career, I realized how uncontrolable media appearance basically is, and therefore do not even think about or plan this area of my work.

JP: What's your attitude towards this current trend of rediscovering genres from the outside of the First World - cumbia, soca, Cuban music or even juke?

US: To me its not a current trend, but something I had started to work on in 1992. As so often, the world is not "real time", but basically, by inertia, is always a couple of decades behind. So, talking about such "trend", which in a way almost makes me laugh to call it like that (since it's a trend of the past...how weird is that?), I have to say that my "real time" looks very different from it.

Analysing it, this trend, to me had a lot to do with a historic period of post-modernism; to be exact, the transition of the 1990s into the first decade of the 2000s. After that point I could strongly feel a change, which manifested to me around 3 years ago. As a conclusion to me, the era of "fusion" is over! It's a dead trend, if you ask me.

JP: Do you think modern-day techno music needs more of lyricism, to be a little bit

US: No, I think techno is just great as it is!

more romantic?

JP: If you played DJ-sets, what would they consist of?

Related Events

CTM.13 Opening Concert

HAU1, Mon 28.01.2013, 19:30 Atom™ & Marc Behrens, Matmos

Alpha txt

HAU2, Mon 28.01.2013, 21:00

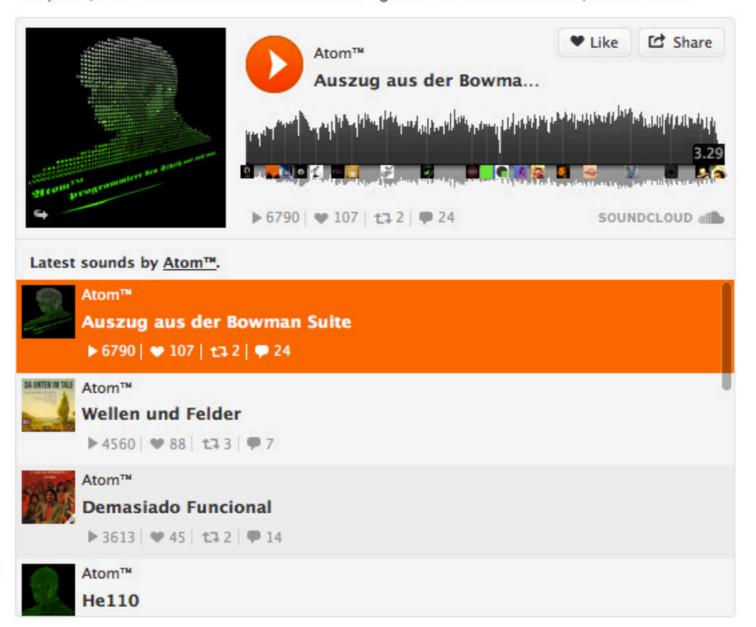
Atom™ presents Alpha txt feat. Material Object

Artist Talk: Atom™

Kunstquartier Studio 1, Tue 29.01.2013, 14:00 Atom[™] in conversation with Max Dax.

JP: If you played DJ-sets, what would they consist of?

US: The basic principle of "DJing" is that it is ultimately of biggest importance to play what the audience wants to hear. That differentiates being an artist from being a service. Hence your question is getting complicated to answer since it implies not only that I was DJ-ing, but, in the first place, that I would be interested in rendering a service to an audience, which I don't.



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JP: Is there some difference between using samples/electronics and live instruments? What skills do you have to possess?

US: I'm not sure what you mean with "live instruments", but assume you mean "acoustic instruments"???

If so, then I have to say that it's kind of obvious, that ANY tool or instrument requires a set of skills, if you want to make something good with it. This fact has been blured by the circumstance that today's societies tolerate all kind of mediocre expression and execution of art and craft, so we easily think "everybody can do it". The truth is, "everybody can do something mediocre" and that's how things are done nowadays.

There is a BIG difference in any art or craft to hear/read/feel a product done by somebody who has skills as compared as to somebody who just touches the surface of a tool. Obviously, by being superficial one may come across something good by chance, yet it is impossible to prolong a high quality, creative output depending on "chance", which is why the "one hit wonder" exists. The skills you need to possess depend on the tool you have and the use you want to give it, in the sense as in to which result you want you to turn it into. It would be a bit too nerdy to get into the skills you need for specific tools I use, so I spare everybody those details.

It's an opinion that results from ignorance, to assume that because a tool that uses electricty it may be different from any other tool human beings use.

JP: Do you believe there's some music that's absolutely bad, evil or unlistenable? Is there music you don't like?

US: Those are two questions, which I will respond to separately:

Yes, there is "bad" music, of course. This requires a complex analysis though, which I may not be able to give here. In a nutshell, there is technically bad and there is a "bad" that refers to the meaning behind – and the reason why – music was made. It may be easier to understand if you compare it to bad painting: of course there is bad painting, as there is always a bad version of anything.

As for "evil", I honestly don't know...it's an ethical definition I can not comment to here.

As for "unlistenable": music, probably more than any other art, in the sense that it "works" almost immediately (while other art, such as visual or written art needs a longer period of digestion), it relies directly to what we call "instinct" or "intuition". Music very much so, does function without having to logically analyse it. Or: you listen to something and you pretty much immediately like it or not. Having said so, of course one can "learn to like" something, but let's leave that behind for a moment – one usually likes or dislikes music in an instant. It may almost be considered a physiological condition which sound one finds pleasant or not, naturally combined with all other sorts of conditioning human beings are exposed to (education, etc.).

It is therefore to say that naturally there is music to everybody that may be considered "unlistenable". I find 99% of what I hear on any radio station or any TV programe unlistenable for example.

JP: Have you changed during your career? How often? What are your plans for the future?

US: Changes are usually difficult to see while you are in the middle of them, yet, with a couple of years of distance, they become quite obvious. Also certain "states" one was in, with some distance to them, seem to appear difficult or even impossible to understand ("what was I thinking???"). So, looking back at my works, from when I started in the late '80s up until now, I certainly can see many changes in myself.

I haven't counted, yet I assume there must have been 2 or 3 big "shifts" in understanding and approach. At the same time there is always a "constant" underneath it all, which is you "real self", and I can see that too, when looking back at my past.

The most recent change happened maybe 3 years ago, when I strongly felt, that, as I expressed in an earlier answer, I felt more attracted to "purity" again, as opposite to "fusion". It's hard to describe what it is, and can only briefly describe it with having a more severe approach to music making and things which surround my activities in general. I think that, historically speaking, we are in a very different moment then, let's say 10 years ago. This is not an abstract analysis, but it's something I can feel very strongly. Therefore my plans for the future are actually my plans for the present, which all express very much that sensation I have about what music should be and how it should react to the current systematical state.





