



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 catalogue, 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 interpret 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 "conservatism", 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.



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...I 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 contain 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 uncontrollable 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 it's 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 more romantic?

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

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

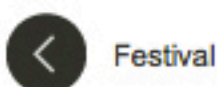
HAU2, Mon 28.01.2013, 21:00

Atom™ presents Alpha txt feat. Material Object

Artist Talk: Atom™

Kunstquartier Studio 1, Tue 29.01.2013, 14:00

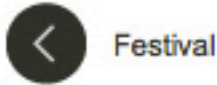
Atom™ in conversation with Max Dax.



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