

kasper t. toeplitz

by [krzysztof sadza]

There certainly isn't much coverage of Kasper T. Toeplitz in the media, and it is even more difficult to get his recordings. As he himself says, he doesn't care about making records as once they're released they become outdated in comparison with what he's doing at the given moment. Despite such an approach of his, Kasper T. Toeplitz is a recognized and respected figure both in the circles of academia and intuitive artists, and his works are challenging both intellectually and emotionally. More details about the man and his actions to be found in the interview below.

Although you were born in Poland, lived there for some time, and, what is most important, still use the language, you're regarded as a French artist. How do you yourself look at the question of your nationality? Does it really matter to you?

Yes, the origins question... ok, so the answer is pretty easy: born in Poland, came in France when being 10 - which suggests it was NOT a personal decision, given the tender age. Since then, yes I live in France or at least France is my "base". And mostly I decided to make music, to live music, when living there, France. And so what?? Nothing probably, at least not in the long run. In the very beginning, the place to live may very well influence what you think about any given art/politic/living choice. But once you have your own vision, the capacity to have it, it doesn't matter any more - you become what you do, and what you do becomes you. In the case of music, I live in Paris but do not play very often there, I do know French musicians, but do not feel as part of this (or any other) "scene". If anything having this kind of "double origin" gives you the possibility to understand faster the difference there is between words and ideas - the same idea can be expressed with different words/languages. Which in terms of music, and its words (solfeggio) becomes pretty essential: people who still think that ONE music is ONLY a certain choice of pitches and durations (and not the idea of this music) are pretty much stuck in 19 century, if not before. I am called a "French" artist (by some) since it can be a way to put some national ideas up-front. But I would never call myself a French musician, nor a polish one. I can feel a sense of "community" or rather of closeness with some (not numerous) artists, but not many - and it is not a question of origins or country.

Could you give us your artistic CV?

Lots, frankly. Starting from 1988 (or before?? well...) I did a lot, or so I feel. To try to resume it somehow, let's say I first was into "contemporary classical" music - my first piece was an opera, the second was a symphony orchestra piece, and followed quite a lot of "contemporary" pieces - mostly acoustic works raging from solo instrument to orchestra, and quite a lot in between (ensembles, string quartets) - but never did I wrote a piano piece, as I don't like the piano. At the time I was not using electronics at all, maybe sometimes some amplification, but not a lot. Very 20th century composition - as at the time I had the feeling (was it right or wrong??) that it was the field in which there was the biggest freedom - of form and structure (I would NOT say this about the current "contemporary" music which is getting so old and dated and regressive). If one wants names, say it was in the Scelsi, Ligeti, Penderecki field, slowly moving toward Nono, Stockhausen and Xenakis. More or less. At the same time I was (and still am) playing electric bass, but almost never in a "traditional" rock set-up. There was this 5 basses ensemble I had, named "Sleaze Art", which I stopped and then used the "Sleaze Art" name for my guitar (and basses) orchestra - which had between 8 and 32 musicians. In the mean-time, my most "Rock" project (think Swans meet Einstürzende Neubauten) was "LA redemption Electrique" - voice, drums, bass. Heavy stuff.

Then I got totally fed-up with the "classical" world (this is where the contemporary music is), and at the same time got immersed into electronics in music - computers. This was more or less in 1998. At the same time I got a grant (from the French government - there are some nice things to be a "French" composer, into the classical field!!) to go to Japan, where I spent some 6 months. This is what I feel is the "break" in my musical life. From then on my music quite changed, to a much more "noisy" form, heavily using electronics (computers in a live setting), and a more "crude" way of writing. But still the composition - seen as the concern about structure and not the sound (the sound being the result of the structure, not the other way around) - is my main concern. So from this moment my contacts with the "classical" world are those with the electronics centers (Ircam, GRM, gmem etc. etc.) but I almost never more write/work with ensembles. Actually I have my own ensemble, which is more some people that play the music I write than a group (the core of them are Didier Casamitjana, who plays classical percussions - symphonic bass drums, tams, gongs - and computers, Laurent Dailleau, on theremin and computer, Jerome Soudan, aka "Mimetic" on percussions and computer, and myself on computerBass (bass directly hooked to a computer) and computers. Sometime other join, as it was recently the case with Julien Ottavi - voice, percussion and computer.)

Well, I also collaborate with other musicians or ensembles, but not as often as before (more on this later). Recently for example in an opera which was played at the Bonn opera, I also used a string orchestra, but those are just hired musicians - they just have to play the notes I wrote, that's all, no profound implication... Actually I ask quite a lot to musicians I work with, it's quite difficult (I am making a clear distinction between working with - which means for me

that I compose the music, and they play it - and collaboration which is a common project - which is your question to come). Well, there are cases where I still write for other musicians, but not as often as before, and I want to make really sure they share (to some point at least) what I mean by music - which is not only the notes, the pitches. Such people can be Isabelle Duthoit (clarinet) or Serge Bertocchi (contrabass saxophone). Maybe others as well, but not too numerous (anymore) - simply giving your music to people so they play (not always well) does not make much sense to me any more.

During all this time I also worked with live events - quite a lot with contemporary dance, always using live musicians, and some (not much) with theatre and other such projects. Never (or I don't remember) with film, as it goes against my idea of music as a "live" art -which by the way explains why I put out so few recordings. I like things to change, to be alive.

But to these days, I would say than my "body of work" is quite huge, with around 6 or 7 orchestra pieces, 4 operas, a lot of ensemble pieces, and so on and so on....

Well, a lot or few doesn't mean much, except a sense of business, probably.

[You're known more for CDs and collaborations made with other artists rather than your own works. Which of the collaborations were supposed to realize your own ideas and which were limited to your mere helping somebody else?](#)

As I said I am maybe more known for collaborations than my personal work, since the collaborations are released as recordings. But really this is only a very small part of my work, since for collaborating with someone this person has to have a strong commitment to music, art etc. etc. - and this is not common. Actually one important collaboration is LE DEPEUPLEUR project, with Zbigniew Karkowski - he has a clear vision of music, we both have this "contemporary classical" background, so there are a lot of things which are already answered, plus a common knowledge... Yes, this is a nice project.

Another one was the NEON GREEN duo with Tetsuo Furudate, another fine musician. I tried for some months a duo with a very good clarinet player - it failed, as our vision was not the same. Then there are sometimes collaborations with a musician on ONE specific project - such an example is the Global String project with Atau Tanaka. So, to answer your question, well, there is not such question for me - if I work with someone, which is NOT so common, it has to be a project I can feel as 100% mine (even if it is a shared project, in the beginning). Otherwise it's useless.....

Then there is also the case of playing with someone, once or twice, which is more like meeting a person - here also is essential the fact of doing "my" music (as opposed to fake something which could please the other person). Such meetings can or can not result in longer collaborations.

So, yes, I played with quite a lot of people (Aube, CCCC, Merzbow, Leandre, Dror Feiler, Victor Nubla, to name a few) - but actually this is not "a lot", when compared to some other musicians. Just some meetings, actually.

Another form of collaboration is with artists non-musicians, which also are not too numerous - I could cite the "stage artist" (for a lack of a better word) Jean-Michel Bruyere - we did work together on this opera in Bonn, "Btting Siki" - the video maker Dominik Barbier, with whom I will play a live video installation in Amsterdam, "Hamlet Machine", the choreographer Myriam Gourfink, for whom I write the music of almost all her pieces... Not too many again, here. And the collaboration there is on the same level - the music is all mine, all decided by myself, it is not a "background" music or anything like that - always played live, always something I can stand for.

[You've been described by Zbigniew Karkowski as the only European artist worth collaborating with. What did your collaboration include and are you happy with its results too?](#)

Zbigniew's words are right - I don't know if I am the only one, but I sure know there are very few INTERESTING artists over there...

[Another sound-maker I'd like to ask you about is Zenial of the Palsecam collective. What do you think of his works? Do you know any music that is made in Poland now?](#)

Zenial - or Palsecam (never quite got to understand who is who - but never mind) is another case of what I would "maybe" not call exactly a collaboration (even if it of course was one) but maybe part of some collaborative network - so to speak. In "this" field of music (call it noise, or experimental, or electronic or whatever) there are quite a lot of people, but of course spread all over the world. So this kind of collaborations - things I am very open to - are more like a way of meeting people, be it in a virtual way. It will not be the same - from an artistic point of view - than really working with someone, in the same room, or even discussing with someone, as this is the moment when the output can become something "hybrid" - in between the 2 persons, in between the 2 ideas. In a mail exchange each of the participants works alone; which is fine, and as I told a nice and handy way to "meet" people (and ideas) but not quite the best way. Consider it as being a first step. Other person I have kind of a similar project is the Swiss noise artist PHROQ - even if here the process is slightly different - I first

met him, saw me playing, we discussed. But the kind of interaction I prefer is certainly when meeting the real person - this is probably what makes my projects like the DEPEUPLEUR work with Zbigniew Karkowski so much more heavy - we know each other quite well now, every time he's in Paris he stays at my place (which last year became quite a long time!!), so when we make music there is not much talking - we know what it is about. Now for my next projects this is more like this that I want to work - meet people directly (for an upcoming project, which I would like to be an instrumental noise duo, I proposed to 2 sax players - Ulrich Krieger and Dror Feiler - to meet somewhere for a couple of days, play and see the result. Obviously it's more difficult to set up such a situation - in at least financial terms, between Paris, Berlin & Stockholm - but more "real".

As for music done in Poland, no I don't know much - not that I would not like to know more. But, as said before, it's not a question of a country, I believe.

[Tell us about the Global String project. Does it still exist? What effects does it give?](#)

"Global String" still exists or at least was supposed to be really alive now - we (Atau Tanaka & myself) were supposed to present it in New York those days - but it was cancelled a few days ago (because of - you guessed it - money problems). "Global String" is this music / installation project - a very long string which could be wrapped around the world. At this point yes, it becomes a virtual string, and yes, there is some internet involved in. Basically the first idea was "how long a string can we make?" Actually the installation is split between 2 points (which can be in 2 different locations, countries or continents). In each location there is a very long string (actual steel string, very thick and about 20 meters long) on which one of "plays" - or in other words excites it by hitting, rubbing, scratching it - whatever. This is not the sound you hear, as all this information (picked by sensors) are treated by a computer which applies this forces to a giant virtual string, whose tension and molecular structure we precised, and whose length is determined by the location of the second end of this string, or rather by the path the information, carried on internet, "choose" to reach the other end (you know that an e-mail send, say from Paris to Paris, can very well go through California, or Japan - this is the beauty and the purpose of internet). Then this info is mixed by what the second player does at the other end of the string - imagine 2 musicians playing one string - and the resulting sound is "just" this. We did this project 3 times so far - the last time it was in Austria, during the Ars Electronica festival, and this time it was between 2 locations in the same building, but we were sending the info all around Austria - which made for a longer string. Needless to say internet also acts like some kind of fuzz box, degrading the signal.

[I'd like to talk about to your first CD, "Fissure" on Sonoris. The press release says that its three pieces form a whole. To me it seems quite the opposite – each of them is a separate, complete whole. What did I fail to notice then?](#)

Actually here you are totally right - those are 3 pieces put on a CD, not one long piece divided in 3 parts. Of course, you could see it as a more or less seamless continuity - there are not any abrupt stylistic changes, yes. But no, 3 different pieces. Basically here is the question of what the artist produces and what the "publisher" decides to say - of course he put the money and effort to make it to the CD, and for sure if he wants to present it a certain way, it's ok with me as long as he doesn't change the music - and in the end it seems than you - the listener - hears what it is about (or not)

[You also perform other composers' pieces, which seems unusual for the non-academic milieu you're a part of.](#)

People whose music I play, are a limited number of musicians (composers) - and only people I admire quite a lot, and also people whose music I can really relate to. And of course it has to have some meaning - I used to play a Varèse piece (Density 21.5, which I re-wrote for electric fuzz bass) - I am not quite sure if now it would have some meaning (probably not). Same goes for Stockhausen SOLO, which I was thinking about playing on bass & computer - but will it "change" something in the musical world - not quite sure of it. Then playing an Eliane Radigue piece, who just wrote a piece for me, may have a strong meaning. Same goes for Phill Niblock. The third composer would be Iancu Dumitrescu. Maybe there would be someone else, maybe not.

So, why do I do it?? The first answer could be a silly one - because I can. Because I can have enough "fluency" on my instrument (bass and/or computer) to be able to use it for someone else's project (I could not do it on a cello, on cello I only play my own music). But then the real point is, I guess, because I feel it is important and "right" to do so. I don't see that much difference between playing my music, composing it for other musicians or playing someone else's music - it's all part of the same process, and I would never do ANY of this with some musical proposition I would not believe in (I will never write a pop song, for instance, or some tonal "nice" string part for a movie). Call it integrity, if you will.

[What are you working on at the moment?](#)

Million of things. But more precisely?? I could align titles of pieces and dates but this is not the point - yes, sure I do quite a lot of projects (in a few days I leave for more than one month, touring, working on different projects, so yes, quite a lot). But what for, what is the "great vision"?? Now I have formed what can be thought of as "my ensemble" (no fancy name!!) -

basically some musicians (3 or 4 or 5) with whom I work quite often, and who understand my work, and who defend it. So yes, I will carry this project, working with them. And trying to expand what the idea of music is - one of my next projects (next November) is a dance piece - for which I will write the dance. But not seen as something else, but as music, silent music (come on, music is not about sound, is it?? It's about an attitude, a way of thinking, a way of structuring). OK, in my dance piece (named CAPTURE) there will be sounds - and heavy ones - played by the dancers, or more precisely by the capture (made by a camera) of their movements. But as I said it's just another way of doing the same - just as using a symphony orchestra, or a computer or a fuzz box, is just about the same - doing music.

I guess that's it.

[Thank you for your answers](#)

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