

# Nik Bärtsch - Infos & Bio

## Ecstasy through asceticism

RITUAL GROOVE MUSIC, the title of my first CD, also points to the fundamental concept of my musical thinking. The music shows a close affinity to architecturally organized space and is governed by the principles of repetition and reduction as well as by interlocking rhythms. A piece of music can be entered, inhabited like a room. It moves forward and transforms through obsessive circular movements, superimposition of different meters and micro-interplay. The listeners attention is directed toward minimal variations and phrasing. The band becomes an integral organism - like an animal, a habitat, an urban space. One must think with ears and hands.

Normally, we work in three distinct formations. The group MOBILE plays purely acoustic music, performed in rituals of up to 36 hours, including light- and room design. The Zen-funk quartet RONIN, by contrast, is more flexible and plays the compositions more freely. As a solo performer I perform my compositions on prepared piano with percussion.

Despite the tightly organized compositional construction, improvisation plays an important role in our music. On the one hand, accentuation, ghost notes, and variations within a composition are tossed back and forth between the musicians; on the other hand, a particular voice within a composition might have more freedom than the others. In doing so, that voice forms an independent module that can interact with the strictly notated interlocking patterns in continuously changing ways. Groove-habitats or void musical space of raw poetry emerge.

My thinking and music are based on the tradition of urban space. They are not distilled from a national or stylistic tradition but from the universal sound of cities. The city in its roaring diversity requires an ability to focus and concentrate on the essential: to measure one's actions, to remain silent at the right place. This music draws its energy from the tension between compositional precision and the self-circumvention of improvisation. From self-implied restriction stems freedom. Ecstasy through asceticism.

Nik Bärtsch , January 2003

## Bio

Born 1971 in Zurich. Pianist, Composer and Producer. Lives in Zurich and Berlin. Instruction in piano and percussion from the age 8. 1997 Graduation from the 'Musikhochschule Zürich'. 1989-2001 studies in philosophy, linguistics and musicology at the University of Zurich. 2003/04 stay in Japan for half a year.

Ongoing work on his RITUAL GROOVE MUSIC as pianist and composer. Leader of MOBILE (since 1997; with Kaspar Rast, Mats Eser & Sha) and the zen-funk quintet RONIN (since 2001; with Kaspar Rast, Björn Meyer, Andi Pupato & Sha). Instructor for 'Practical Aesthetics' at the 'Musikhochschule Zürich/Winterthur' (2000-2003).

1999 and 2002 career award of the 'UBS Cultural Foundation'

2002 'Werkjahr' (career award) from the city of Zurich

2004 culture-award from the town of Zollikon (appreciation-award)

## Relevant concerts & projects:

### With MOBILE:

Production and composition of the BLUE trilogy, performed over a period of three years with concerts of 36 hours respectively:

2000: 'AREA BLUE' in Zurich; 2001: 'AQUA BLUE' in Baden; 2002: 'MU BLUE' in Zurich (together with the architects oos)

2003: 'Water Church Ritual', Wasserkirche Zürich, with guest Walter Grimmer, cello, 6 hour mirror performance.

2005: 'Perpetual Rhythm - a musical dance ritual', with Butho dancer Imre Thormann & his Bodygarage Tokyo, 8 hour performance in the Rondorama on the Stanserhorn (Co-Production with Stanser Musiktage).

2005: 'SEE - a live musical soundpicture', 4 hour performance on the lake stage in Zurich; together with oos (Co-Production with the Theaterspektakel Zurich).

2005: Openair performance together with the Gagaku ensemble of the Osaka Gakuin University Japan at the Hiyoshi Shrine in Otsu Japan.

### Large Compositions:

'Modul Ritual', New Chamber Funk I, composition for 4 saxophones, piano, rhodes, drums & percussion (70 minutes, written in Japan 2003/04 for the ARTE QUARTETT).

'Orchestrated Moduls', New Chamber Funk II, composition for RONIN and the Ensemble für Neue Musik Zurich (2005, 60 Minutes).

'Macbeth' by Shakespeare/Müller, UA Sophiensäle Berlin 2004, music theatre, director: Nora Somaini.

Solo project 'Hishiryo' for prepared piano and percussion (since 2001)

### Concerts at important Festivals:

'Athens Festival' in Athens (Gr); for the 'Mozarteo Brasileiro' in Sao Paulo (Bra); 'Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival'(Ger); 'JazzClassica' at Schloss Elmau (Ger); 'Rheingau Festival' (Ger); 'Festival de Musique de Menton' (F); Pianofestival St. Petersburg (Rus); Sergey Kuriokhin International Festival St.Petersburg (Rus); Jazzfestival Kaunas (Lit); Jazzfestival Schaffhausen (CH); Jazzfestival Onze Plus Lausanne (CH); 'JazzNoJazz' festival Zürich (CH); 'Live at Sunset' festival Zürich (CH); Menuhin Festival in Gstaad (CH); Stanser Musiktage (CH).

Film music for the documentary film projects PHOTO SUISSE (2003/04) and DESIGN SUISSE (2005/06) of Swiss TV SFDRS.

Music for the CD 'Design Hören' of the architecture magazine 'HOCHPARTERRE' & the ITH (2004)

### Collaborations:

Collaboration with the clarinet player, composer and producer Don Li on his TONUS-MUSIC (1996 - 2002); CH New Jazzfestival tour with Harald Haerter 1997; Final at the 'European Jazzcompetition' of the Jazzfestival Leverkusen 1995 with the band 'the groove cooperative'.

### Other important theatre-compositions:

'Titus Andronicus' by Shakespeare/Müller at the Theater Kampnagel in Hamburg (Festival Junge Hunde 1999); 'Gier' by Sarah Kane and 'Kühltransport' by Maxim Biller at TIF Dresden 2001 resp. 2002; 'Medea' by Euripides' at the Stadttheater Mönchengladbach 2002; director: Nora Somaini.'

### Selection of Recordings

Nik Bärtschs Ronin, »STOA«, ECM, Release: Februar 2006

Nik Bärtschs Ronin, »REA«, Tonus-Music Records 2004

Nik Bärtschs Ronin, »Live«, Tonus-Music Records s 2003

Nik Bärtschs Ronin, »Randori«, Tonus-Music Records 2002

Nik Bärtschs Mobile, »AER«, Tonus-Music Records 2004

Nik Bärtschs Mobile, »Ritual Groove Music«, Tonus-Music Records 2001/2005

Nik Bärtsch, »Hishiryo«, Piano Solo, Tonus-Music Records 2002

## Press

»The pianist and composer Nik Bärtsch from Zurich is among the most innovative musicians of the Swiss jazz scene.« (Neue Zürcher Zeitung)

»Nik Bärtsch is an unsung wunderkind of European new music«  
(Ellen Pearlman, Brooklyn Rail, New York)

»Cool modules instead of true songs, polyrhythmic funk that's hypnotically tenacious.«  
(Rolling Stone)

»Groove without ego – Swiss musician Nik Bärtsch makes magnificent zen-funk.«  
(Süddeutsche Zeitung)

»Bärtsch, 33, has been refining his aesthetic of manual repetition for years, both as a solo pianist and in various formations. He has so far released half a dozen CDs of 'modules'. His new album 'Rea' brings out the best in this sonic paradox: the more rigid the frame, the more intense the drive.« (Die Zeit)

»Bärtsch has managed to discover a style of his own before nonexistent.« (Jazz`n`More)

»Extremely subtle erotic of material poverty« (Basler Zeitung)

»Bärtsch presents his foudroyant trio RONIN on the new album »Randori«, released concurrent with the solo recording »Hishiryo«. Both albums are convincing examples of a deliberate aesthetics reduced to the essentials.« (Der Bund, Bern)

»'Doing Nothing at the Right Moment' is the keynote to Nik Bärtsch's output, where jazz, funk and classical music are virtually taken hostage. On a minimalist foundation, he builds a tight yet flexible bamboo frame to exercise the four ronin.« (Die Wochenzeitung Zürich).



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