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THE M’S
AN INTERVIEW WITH GUDRUN GUT

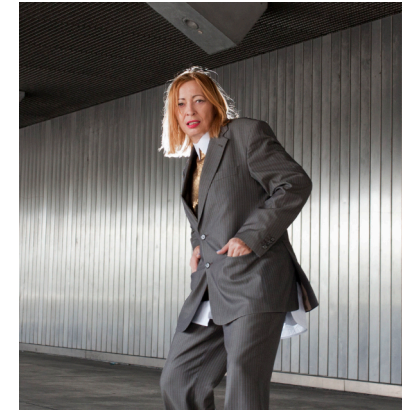
Gudrun Gut is a sound artist, label owner and festival organiser from Berlin. She has been producing music for over four decades, including in bands such as Malaria!, Mania D, Einstürzende Neubauten and Matador. Since the 1990s she has worked primarily as a solo artist.

You have been an artist for several decades. Which other artists influenced you in the beginning and who inspires you today in your artistic work?

In the beginning – that was the end of the 70s – my friends influenced me. We listened to music and talked about it. We wanted to do something new. In West Berlin, my friends were my family. I also followed music newspapers (NME came out weekly from London at the time) and radio (John Peel). Music was always very important to me and those around me. That’s where the friction with society and with our lives took place. I was a Bowie fan, Lou Reed, Velvet Underground, Eno, Patti Smith.

What was the first instrument you came into contact with?

The classic recorder... :)



In “Weisses Blatt” you sing: My grandma played the piano. When you look back on your childhood or youth, what or who triggered your decision to become a musician? Was it your grandma and her playing the piano?

Yes! But the trigger wasn’t my grandma. At the time, however, she insisted that all children get music lessons. And so I learned to play the accordion. However, my taste in music went in a different direction – I was always very enthusiastic about music.

As a teenager, I worked for a mail-order distributor for underground records. But the accordion was a good basis for later playing the drums. I didn't really make the decision to be a musician, it just developed over time. It was clear that it had to be something artistic. Whether it was music or art or film didn't matter.

Musical virtuosity was always foreign and suspicious to me. But I do understand the nerds. It's close. I'm neither of them.



Do you have any rituals that you use when making music? And if so, would you like to share one of them with the EX! readers?

Ha! Yes. I put off new compositions for as long as

possible. I do everything unnecessary – such as housework like cleaning and vacuuming – until I feel ready. So the ritual is: completely clear your head.

How do you decide on themes or concepts for your projects/publications?

Themes often arise from something that is already there. At first it is often a vague idea that gradually becomes clearer. One thing fits into the other.

For example, the Monika Werkstatt also arose from the fact that the music industry had changed a lot. It had somehow become pointless to pack this endless studio work into an album that then wouldn't sell. There were almost only solo artists who were designing ever more perfect concert experiences. Everything was played safe and became lonely and totally perfected without really making any money. I thought the fun and the essence had to go back into the music. What is the best art form to do something together? Music! So I

brought the solo artists from the label environment together and they developed something together. In the Werkstatt. It's about exchange and experimentation. Everyone brings something to the table. The project continued with concerts and international tours and talks, usually around four different artists were involved. For the albums, even fourteen.

When working on the book "M_Dokumente", there was of course also a call for music. We still had unreleased material from the bands (Mania D., Malaria!, Matador) for the "Rare Originals". But some tracks were only hinted at and almost in the demo stage or live versions. This offered new interpretations. Who could do this better than the Monika Werkstatt – fourteen women go into the studio and interpret the old material. The Mania D tracks in particular really came into their own. This is how the "M-Sessions" came about. Beate Bartel was an important figure here, she has a very well-maintained

archive and was also part of the Werkstatt.

Instead of electronic music with a straight beat, listeners are often invited to dance and not to think about the lyrics that the song may have. What experiences have you had? Do people respond more to your sounds or do you get more feedback for the lyrics that accompany them?

Both. I think both are equally important. Even if the lyrics are short, they should be relevant and consistent. I like lyrics and music that leave something open for the listeners.

Do you think music should convey the values and ideals that a person who creates music carries within themselves?

Music usually does.

Do you have a favourite instrument, a special synth or a special sample that you like to use again and again? If so, what is it?

In recent years I have been a big fan of the Make Noise 0-

Coast. It is a crazy standalone modular synth, it does what it wants and often surprises me. The basses are big.

What do you prefer, being a solo artist or a band member?

Both.

In artistic circles of sub- and independent culture, there is currently a lot of discussion about DIY, individualism and freedom, as well as anti-capitalism and anarchism. Which ideals do you think have been a common thread running through this genre since the beginning of (experimental) electronic music in the 1970s and will perhaps still shape its content in twenty years?

All of the above! I think it will also play a role in the future.

What do you think is the purpose of music?

Very simple: to liberate and make you happy. To understand the world on a different level. To let yourself go. To lose yourself. To be inspired. To open synapses.

To free your mind and body.

What do you particularly like about (experimental) electronic music?

That it challenges me. It makes me look at life in a new way. Sometimes complicated music annoys me. Then it's too exhausting for me. Then I prefer to listen to something simple – but it shouldn't be boring.

Do you use unconventional instruments to produce your music?

Yes, of course – or what is still unconventional today?

Which of your own albums is your personal favourite and why?

The soundtrack to the series is good.

I think the album "Moment" is my favourite 'real' album at the moment. Just like the album "Emotion" by Malaria!. Somehow they fit together. I recently listened to the album "Emotion" all the way through again and was really impressed. It's totally consistent. I know that I was

really proud of the album back then – I still am.

Do you have a musical or other artistic role model? If so, would you like to tell EX! readers who it is?

No, not really. I don't really.

On the one hand, producing electronic music is easy these days thanks to a rich and easily accessible range of technology, software and instruments. On the other hand, in the age of streaming services and AI, it is difficult to create high-quality tracks and thus reach an audience and inspire them in the long term. What motivates you to stay true to yourself and keep going?

My curiosity. I have to inspire myself. If I am to get involved, I have to feel something – it has to be urgent somehow...

How do you prepare for concerts compared to producing music in the studio?

Completely different vibe. At the moment I'm not playing a new album but a hybrid

set – that is, pieces from the repertoire interpreted differently. I also change the set from time to time. I add pieces and throw others out. It's fun and then it doesn't get boring. I then practice the sequence in the old-fashioned way – you have to internalise the individual music and quickly forget something. With Monika Werkstatt it's improvisation – I concentrate on the instruments I play and try out new things with them before we get together. I'm a fan of drum machines. I can try out beats for hours. For new studio productions I first have to free myself up and ideally play with instruments that I haven't touched for a long time...

When you're on stage, what's the most important thing for you?

Hm. That everything works – that I relax. That the audience reacts. That we experience something together.

When are you playing in Leipzig?

Hopefully soon again – I love

Leipzig, Dresden, Chemnitz!!
The triangle.

Is there anything in the field of literature or film that has shaped or influenced you?

As a teenager I loved Buñuel's films, also Eisenstein, etc. I've actually been enjoying going to the cinema again for the last two years. I had a 20-year break... Books are always inspiring. I loved Elfriede Jelinek.

Is there a piece of music that has significantly changed or influenced your life or career? If so, what is it called?

Maybe Neu!, „The Black Album“. Not a single piece.

What role do collaborations play in your artistic work?

It is absolutely important to work with others – especially after a solo album, I always have a strong need to do something with others.

When it comes to collaborations with other artists, how do you choose?

It just has to fit. Also to my situation and my needs.

Which collaboration do you remember fondly and why?

Actually, all of them. Oceanclub, AGF, Irmeler, Mabe Fratti. Werkstatt. It was always a great pleasure and I learned a lot from all of them!!!

What feedback about your art do you remember fondly?

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Has your work as a DJ or musician changed over the course of your career and if so, how?

Yes, something has actually changed. I am much more generous and I am happy to delegate. And I am no longer as narrow-minded as I used to be. Haha.

How would you see your role as an artist in society?

Oh? I'm just there and I do things and I try to stay relevant. I'm not playing a role, I'm not an actress.

How did the collaboration with public television and your mini-series “GUT” come about? This is rather unusual.

Yes, I thought so too. It was really quick. Heiko Lange asked me if I wanted to do a series in the anti-format. He then arranged it pretty quickly through Kobalt (the production company). Everything went like clockwork. I didn't expect it. It was really fun. A completely new challenge. I also thought the format was great straight away – the ARD media library is wonderful, you can always watch it – for 2 years – whenever you want. Great. Check “GUT” out!



In this documentary, you can once again see your close

connection to nature, which is also evident in your solo albums. How much influence does nature have on your artistic work and how do you convey this in your music?

I discovered nature really late. Back in Berlin, I wasn't really interested in it. And then I wanted something else. I was missing something. And here in the country I found it. Being. Everything changes naturally and you are part of it. A walk in nature sometimes works wonders for slightly stressed people like me. It only influences my artistic work insofar as it gives me the concentration to work in the studio without any major distractions. Apart from a walk.

If I remember correctly, you said in your documentary “GUT” that you would also like to be a filmmaker or would even prefer to be one. What fascinates you about this idea?

During my time as a student in Berlin, I thought that I wanted to be an experimental filmmaker. Because that's where all the

arts come together – sound, image, text, montage.

You have been running the label Monika Enterprise since 1997. How do the musicians get to your label? Do you approach artists or do they tend to approach you?

I get a lot of demos – or I’m approached – or someone recommends something to me. Or I see a concert and I am impressed. The last release was “Post Neo” – I got to know and appreciate them while they were working on the music. Apart from that, we’re not releasing much at the moment. We’re working on a documentary about the label.

You once said that you founded Monika Enterprise because up to that point there hadn’t been a label exclusively for female musicians and a label for electronic music would therefore have a unique selling point. When you look back now, was or is the label more of a platform for the careers of solo artists or for exclusively female bands or has it also developed into a

real creative community with mutual exchange?

Yes, I think so. There is a new self-image for women in music today. For Monika, the “4 Women No Cry” series was super important – four artists from four countries on one album, who later met for the “7 Women No Cry” finale in Berlin – e.g. Lucrecia Dalt (Columbia) and Julia Holder (USA) and Manekinekod (Greece) are still allies and have supported each other.

The highlight of the artist collaborations and the logical conclusion for me was the Monika Werkstatt. Solo artists play together. I knew all of them but they didn’t know each other. A lively exchange about all kinds of topics and questions.

Are there certain selection criteria for the decision to release an album on your label?

The criteria are in my head and gut.

Were there any difficulties when starting your labels

Moabit Musik and Monika Enterprise?

Of course! Often there isn’t enough money. Or a wonderful record doesn’t sell at all. That happens.

I often borrowed money privately – the banks didn’t support that at all.

Ocean Club was a club and radio show series in the late 90s and 2000s that you helped organise and design. How do you choose tracks for your DJ sets?

Yes, Ocean Club was great. But I haven’t done any DJ sets for a few years now – or rather, I do them very, very rarely.

When I think back to my own development as a DJ, I started out playing with tapes and CDs in the 1990s, and later with vinyl. In the mid-2000s I switched to a laptop and have stayed true to that ever since. Younger generations, and especially DJs in the electronics sector, now only play with smartphones and USB sticks. What do you think of that and which medium is your

favourite?

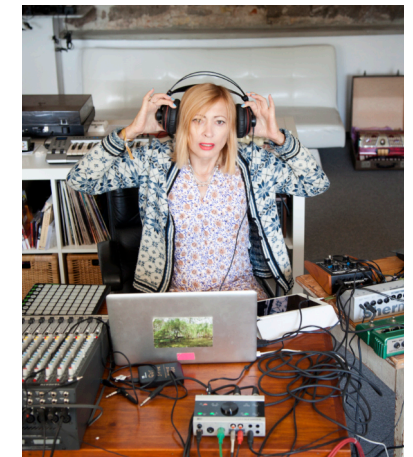
I did that too. If the music is good, everything is good. Technology is just a tool.

You once said that the term DJane is no longer acceptable. Why do you think that is, when we live in a time where particular attention is paid to gender-neutral language?

What is gender-neutral about DJane? Then also DJ-Tarzan?? DJ is disc jockey. That has all the asterisks!

What do you prefer, DJing or playing your own music live?

Your own music. DJing can also be great fun. But you can’t do everything.



As an artist, label owner and festival organiser, you have always been a strong advocate for women in the music industry. For some time now, there have been more and more festivals organised by women for women. Do you see a positive development in the participation of women in the music business or do you think there is more of a division into two camps?

Women's festivals have always existed. For me and many of my colleagues, that bridged the bad times (the time when no festival booked women). Yes, of course it's great when festivals don't just book men! Pop culture is a reflection of society – why just the opinion, the music, the image of men? I think it's an absolutely positive development. More of that!

Feminism in the cultural sector has led to many female artists being booked solely because of their gender and the associated quota, and this is also communicated to them as such. Their art is often actually secondary. Have

you had similar experiences and is this perhaps a recent phenomenon in the event business? What do you think of this quota mentality in music?

Quotas must be there because there is no other way. It is the dream thinking of those who think that it would work without quotas. History shows that there is hardly any change without the fight of the oppressed. The transition may sometimes seem unfair and painful, but it has to be there.



However, I do not think that society always and everywhere has to be represented fairly. That is boring. We always need niches. Fields of experimentation in which one can act completely free

of guidelines. Art needs free spaces, safety zones, workshops.

Since 2008 you have also been co-organising the UM Festival and curating the music section of the festival. Are there any differences in the approach to your other projects?

Yes, very much! Because here in the country the needs and demands are different. It is not an urban space like in Berlin. Our audience is children, the elderly, farmers, workers, art lovers, students, the unemployed, the curious and connoisseurs. Everyone has to be convinced.

I stick to our old Ocean Club motto by Thomas Fehlmann: meaningful entertainment. It's fun. There's not much else going on in the country – and a festival always has a certain appeal just because of the bratwurst and the beer. Exchange with other people is an important part of the festival.

There has been a lot of discussion recently about the use of artificial

intelligence in art. What is your position on this topic?

I tried to write texts with AI. I found it stupid and annoying. I always think of something better. But AI is here to stay. It still needs to be regulated – not that we all will be ruled by robots. ;)

The 1990s are currently experiencing a revival in fashion, music and art. Tapes are being produced and events are being advertised with physical flyers. What revival would you like to see and why?

I'm listening to a bit of prog rock again at the moment. But do I really want a revival? No, not really.

What are important memories for you in relation to your artistic work?

? That's too much for me. I can't think of anything off the top of my head.

What else do you like to do that has nothing to do with music?

Riding an e-bike. Playing games, doing nothing. I've

rediscovered the old quality of hanging out. When we were young, we always hung out – with friends and stuff. Yes, I'm hanging out again now... celebrating doing nothing. The rediscovery of boredom – I agree with Frieder Butzmann on that! Boredom is important for inventing something new.

What question did you miss in this interview and how would you answer it?

None!!



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