

Kessler | Winterschladen

Le son des couleurs
_3.6kSec RGB

project information

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“If red were a piece of music – what would it sound like?”

_3.6kSec RGB | Le son des couleurs

A compelling fusion of colour impressions and a listening experience into a single encompassing sensory epiphany – this spark of inspiration moved the Duesseldorf composer of electronic music Thomas **Kessler** (*1962) and the Cologne saxophonist Bernd **Winterschladen** (*1960) to join forces in their latest musical endeavour. Aptly named ‘Le son des couleurs’ – ‘The Sound of Colours’ – this stylish project is dedicated to the exploration and elaboration of the phenomenon of colour-sound synesthesia and association.

The resulting evocative compositions – ten sound collages in all – each take up and interpret a shade of colour from “les claviers de couleurs” – the ‘colour keyboards’ of the visionary French-Swiss architect **Le Corbusier** (1887 – 1965). These intriguingly embody his unique theory regarding colours and their singular effect upon the human psyche.

‘Le son des couleurs’ is a suite of ten pieces, each depicting and interpreting a specific tone colour, each piece lasting six times sixty seconds and resulting in precisely one hour (3,600 seconds) of music. RGB refers to the RGB colour model involving the additive combination of red, green and blue light, the so-called three additive primary colours, to generate any desired hue for the detection, representation and display of images in electronic systems. The pertinent source code is _3.6kSec RGB, taken here for the project name which is illustrative of the concept behind the artistic venture: multimedia performances uniting music with light and video art, in addition to architecture and modern dance.

‘Le son des couleurs’ operates along the stylistic frontier between contemporary jazz and modern art music. A manifestly dexterous interplay between the antithetical extremes of intimate proximity and unbounded vastness pervades the pieces. The prevalent use of hushed tones delicately fathoms the depths of the dynamic range of sound up to the very threshold of silence. In this context, Winterschladen’s saxophone plays the role of the vox humana, personifying the wanderer of flesh and blood against the backdrop of the abstract expanse of Kessler’s soundscapes, where sumptuous atmospherics evince flights of visual imagination. __

text: Benigno-Isagani del Rio

Le Corbusier's „Claviers de couleurs“

“Les claviers de couleurs” – the ‘colour keyboards’ are a key element of the life’s work of the renowned French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier.

The first collection of 43 shades of colour was conceived by the grand seigneur of modern architecture in 1931. In 1959, a second, supplementary array of 20 solid colours adapted to the changing conceptions of the time were added to the first ‘keyboard’. On the basis of his experience as architect and painter, Le Corbusier arranged the shades of colour shown on individual cards in such a manner as to permit three to five colours respectively to be isolated or combined with one another with the aid of a sliding template. Each card presents a unique colour mood intended to create a specific atmosphere in a room.

With this, Le Corbusier created not only a useful tool but a new canon for puristic colour theory. The impact of this doctrine upon the history of architecture is seminal and profound. Up to the present day, the fundamental precepts for the treatment of colour and effect, Corbusier’s “Polychromie Architecturale” are accorded legendary status by contemporary architects, designers and artists. The enduring currency and validity of the “Polychromie Architecturale” to all possible matters of style and taste has proven itself throughout the decades. —

Reference and suggested reading: Le Corbusier “Polychromie Architecturale”, Arthur Rüegg (Ed.), copyright 2006 Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel

Thomas Kessler: The story behind _3.6kSec RGB

As a child I was to be found painting most of the time, immersed hours on end in a fascinating realm of form and colour. From the very beginning, ‘hearing colours’ was something very natural for me, and with respect to this idiosyncrasy and to yet other such synesthesiac tendencies, little has changed in the course of my life. Even today, whereas analytic listening ‘tastes’ like hard work to me, imagery comes effortlessly, practically of their own accord. Upon closing my eyes when listening to music I do not envision people playing instruments but colours moving in abstract mindscapes. Thus I came upon the idea of switching around the delightful conceit of ‘hearing colours’ to developing music based on colour impressions.

In the course of my search of tangible points of departure I recalled my time as a student of Architecture, where I fixed upon Le Corbusier’s theory of colour, “Les claviers de couleurs” – the ‘colour keyboards’ – which I had encountered then. This was most probably because of the reference to music (i.e the ‘keyboards’) in the name of Le Corbusier’s conceptual masterwork. Browsing through my library after that, I actually found a collection of his colour cards, hand-painted with the original pigments. These displayed an inherent and almost hypnotic vibrancy and intensity of hue, especially in connection with sunlight. Thus I found an ideal foundation to build upon. Subsequently, I observed a daily ritual which initially consisted of spending some time in complete silence in my recording studio. Later, upon this substrate of a nearly Zen-like void, the first notes emerged like stars coming out of a depthless blue twilight sky. On my note stand, there were no music sheets – just pages from the Le Corbusier Book of Colours.

Enter Bernd Winterschladen. I explained my concept to him and played him my first ‘aural’ sketches. Bernd was instantly enthusiastic. His wide-ranging experience gleaned from numerous projects where he combined music with other art forms such as Literature and Drama was to be an enriching and empowering contribution to our joint endeavour, whose prelude took the form of intense exchanges regarding our feelings towards specific colour tones we’d painstakingly select. Le Corbusier’s account of his own selection process became our key inspiration in our labours to translate colour into sound: “The brush or the spatula in hand, I confined myself exclusively to what I felt, without forgetting that Mr Chevreuil, in his time, had created more than ten thousand nuances!” This pronouncement enjoined us to preserve the spontaneous character of our compositions, then what brings to bear on colour composition applies in equal measure to the fitting rendition of colour into music. The judicious and for all intents and purposes time-consuming process of selection from an initially limitless diversity of possibilities leads ultimately to focussing upon essentials. In comparison, the actual recording sessions were concluded swiftly and effortlessly. —



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- 01 .. bleu ceruleum .. 6:00
- 02 .. rouge vif .. 6:00
- 03 .. terre de sienne claire .. 6:00
- 04 .. gris clair .. 6:00
- 05 .. rose .. 6:00
- 06 .. terre d'ombre .. 6:00
- 07 .. bleu outremer .. 6:00
- 08 .. bleu foncé .. 6:00
- 09 .. gris foncé .. 6:00
- 10 .. jaune vif .. 6:00

Thomas Kessler – atmospherics, loops, treatments

Bernd Winterschladen - tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet

recorded May 2008 - April 2010

p.fort base studio, Duesseldorf / Germany