

Interview with Marc Sabat

Vezza

You were educated in Toronto and New York, and then moved to Berlin to live and work. Why did you decide to live in Berlin, but have your education in North America?

Sabat

Things evolved one step at a time. In the 1990s I was living and working in Toronto, equally active in performing and composing. I was performing with groups like Arraymusic, a string quartet dedicated to new music called Modern Quartet, and a duo I had formed with pianist Stephen Clarke. I was composing chamber music, solos, and medium-size pieces for mostly Canadian ensembles. A colleague of mine told me about a residency program in Stuttgart at the Akademie Schloss Solitude and asked if I might be interested. At that time I wanted to get outside the Canadian scene, and I was interested in Europe. I had some contact with Walter Zimmermann, who teaches in Berlin. I had played some of his music and had gotten to know him when he came to Toronto. I was very impressed by the music he was making and some other European music I had come across. That was my situation at the time, so I decided to apply for the Solitude Residency.

I found out later that the juror had been Christian Wolff, and because of aesthetic “family connections”, I suppose, I was one of the composers that he chose for that residency. So I had a chance to spend a year in Germany and get to know a little bit about how things are over here. While I was in that residency a number of events came together, my parents died, both in one year, and various other circumstances brought me into thinking that I wanted to change where I was based. Part of the Solitude residency was a possible three months extension in Berlin. That happened in 1999, so for three months I had a chance to live in an apartment here and get to know a little bit of the city. I liked it quite a lot, and thought I could imagine staying myself here for a stretch. Since then I have been living in Berlin for almost ten years.

Vezza

How would you describe the new music scene in Toronto? What are the differences between the scene in Toronto and the scene in Berlin?

Sabat

In Canada there has been, since the late 1960s, a fairly good system of national public funding through the Canada Council, as well as through various provincial arts councils. There is a fair bit of public funding, which is run by a peer jury system. This means that you need to be very integrated in the local scene to be part of the jury system. You need to be known by your fellow artists, and be active in the scene in order to maintain grants. So there are pluses and minuses. The pluses, of course, are that practicing artists get to make decisions, and that rotates. The scene regulates itself rather than being at the demand of direct political imperatives. That is a pretty good aspect of the system. The negative side is that if you become outside the scene it can be very difficult to get funding. I know a number of very good people who never

managed to get funding. Not based on the quality of their work, in my opinion, but because they do not maintain an easy relationship with their artists and colleagues, and are therefore, rejected and pushed out. That is one negative aspect of the Canadian system.

The other has to do with geography. The larger cities, which tend to be centers where new music is practiced, are quite far apart from each other. From Toronto the next city to the west that is large enough to have an active new music scene is Winnipeg, which is several days by car. Going east the next large city would be Montreal, which is six hours. By comparison that is the distance between Berlin and Cologne. There is quite a lot within a six-to seven-hour radius of Berlin. There is lots of Poland and most of Germany. So one factor the geography creates in Canada, is that the scenes are very much city-based. Going between cities requires funding for air travel, and touring is expensive. That means the new music life is very much about communities within cities. For example, these days in Montreal, there is an active scene around the Bozzini Quartet, Malcolm Goldstein, and Denys Bouliane. In fact, there is quite a range of different scenes in Montreal that I am aware of: Montreal can be a great place to be these days! But if a city gets narrowed down in its focus, then it can become little bit difficult. If you are from a smaller town, for example I grew up on the east coast, which is quite far from anything. The distances one has to travel for composition lessons or for a violin lesson can be quite substantial. It is not always in your hometown. While I was growing up and learning about music, I was lucky enough to have a composition teacher in my hometown. His name was Janis Kalnins, a Latvian composer well-known in the emigré scene. However, for violin lessons my father ended up driving me six hours by car every two weeks to Halifax to study with Philippe Djokic, an excellent violinist who still teaches there today. These are some of the realities in Canada being a very large country. One thing that I like in Germany is that even if you do work a little bit outside the mainstream, or as some kind of independent outsider, which I like to think of myself as being in some sense, it is still possible to develop small networks across many different cities. Places that support your music and your work. That aspect of Europe is nice difference from Canada.

Veza

Stylistically, is there some type of consensus in Berlin that is different from Canada?

Sabat

There are definitely differences. One is that Germany, from what I know of the postwar period, has not only supported German artists. It has been extremely open to supporting the work of people from outside as well. For example, composers like Cage, Scelsi, James Tenney and Feldman, just to name a few. A lot of composers, who in their home countries did not get such substantial exposure, got large grants and opportunities to play at festivals, which tend to have a modern international aura. Maybe they invite an international range of composers because these festivals are well known and have a long history. It has been a long time since there was an international festival in the States (aside from Other Minds in San Francisco, of course). I mean, it has been almost twenty years since New Music America folded. This situation is similar in Canada. There have been new music festivals of national scope, but they tend to focus on national issues. My feeling in Canada was that a lot of the scene was fed by the directions and interests of the people within it. Often

doing very interesting things, but not having as much international dialogue as one encounters in Berlin.

Veza

Do you think that was result of the peer committee you were talking about?

Sabat

I'm not sure. I think that it's a question of the attitude towards what gets funded. New music is, after all, a very small portion of a specialized activity. It is a small subset of the art scene, or idealistically it might be connected to an art scene. More often it is an island within art because not that many people in the visual art scene are familiar with the new music scene. Of course there are a few connections. People like Max Neuhaus who recently passed away. He was somebody who managed to bridge those worlds. Or Bruce Nauman. In any case being such a small scene has made new music quite international. And so I think it is good if the scenes in various countries reflect that nature of it.

Veza

So you are saying it is so small, that in order to get an audience you cannot even rely within your own country. You have to expand out to other countries in order to find a significant audience.

Sabat

That is part of its nature. Think about a new music label like mode records, which is run by Brian Brandt. He is an individual who fell in love with experimental music. And because of his personal contact with Cage, he made an international label. He has got a catalogue of about 200 CDs in print. He is lucky if one issue sells three hundred or four hundred copies, for a bigger name like Xenakis or Feldman, maybe several thousand, but that is with international distribution. The community of people who are actually purchasing these CDs and are dedicated to them is small. That is the nature of it.

Veza

And the truth is they are not profitable. These record companies have to apply for grants from various private and government run institutions in order to get money to produce records.

Sabat

Yes, what we are doing is specialized research. It is *research*, which by its nature *must* be publicly funded one way or another. By kings, rich capitalists, or by institutions, governments, museums, or foundations: that is the only way it can work. Think of a piece of experimental music presented with a nice substantial audience of two hundred to three hundred. Think about the amount of work involved in preparing it, composing it, having the musicians train themselves to perform it. There is no way that it could be a commercial venture. It *should not* be. It is identical to scientists doing experimental research on unusual topics related to gravitation or anything else. The end result is shared knowledge. In our case, it is knowledge about perception, the way we understand the world through sound, the way listening shapes thinking. It is nothing more than that. I do not see anything wrong with it being something that demands public funds.

Veza

So you think of new music as research?

Sabat

Yes, research into listening.

Various institutions have been developed like GEMA, licensing agencies that try to collect royalties on the basis of people listening to new music. The only way those systems have worked is by skewing the numbers completely in favor of something by calling it serious music – “Ernstes Musik”. I am not a great supporter of that system: it is built on the notion that what we are producing is actually a specialized form of commercial product or entertainment that needs to be boosted because of its so-called “artistic merits”. I believe what we are doing is much closer to a kind of public-domain research. But whatever the mechanisms are, they are mechanisms that have to do with subsidy. The fan base alone will never be able to pay for it.

Veza

Seth Josel told me that the government was concerned about audience numbers when it subsidizes new music. They were complaining that not enough people were showing up to concerts. Would you argue against that criticism and tell them it’s research? Or would you agree with them? That more people should be showing up?

Sabat

One of the things that I really appreciate in Germany that I did not mention earlier is the audiences. When I was at Solitude, I was presenting my work, which was very far outside the norm of new music in Germany. It was a kind of experimental tonal music at that time, perhaps with some influences of Satie. I do not know exactly how I would describe it, but the point is that it was weird, even for the context of new music. Nevertheless there was still a substantial audience checking it out. That was quite different to my experience doing small produced events in Canada. Stephen Clarke and I used to put on a series of Morton Feldman’s music. We would play *For John Cage* and there would be seven people in the audience. And I knew exactly who those seven would be. When we did *For John Cage* in Stuttgart, we had an absolutely packed house. Now why is that? Feldman is an American composer. Why in North America is there such a difficulty about that aspect of new music? I do not know.

The audience situation here certainly seems to me to be much better than Canada, and some places in the States. Perhaps it is not true for all places and circumstances, but it seems that one thing that is true here is that people are more willing to accept a kind of music that might be difficult, and not always purely entertaining, and they are interested to check out what that might be. There is a basic curiosity and acceptance of an avant-garde, a music experimentation that might be sometimes very abstract, or difficult, or challenging, or not attractive, or strange and attractive. I have always had the impression that in recent years in the States, the tendency has been something that must be amusing, entertaining, and grabbing the audience.

Veza

Why do you think that difference is there?

Sabat

It's a current social fad that people grab onto. In Germany there was clearly an anti-aesthetic. It grows out of the Adorno history, which of course has its negative sides as well. People *unable* to cope with the idea of pleasure or beauty in music is of course equally ridiculous. Perhaps in the States there was a movement toward populism, which comes back every so often. Sometimes that populism is interesting and experimental, like Harry Partch's music. And sometimes that populism is a kind of self-censorship, pushing oneself into thinking, how will this read? That can be a valid point of inspiration, but my feeling is that often leads to things that are not interesting. For example, the way Andriessen's material got transferred to Bang On A Can. I am not so convinced that transfer was so musically fruitful in the long run. There might have been some interesting music that came out of it in the short-term, but the long-term project, I think, is not so particularly interesting.

Veza

Do you think of it as a dead end? Or do you think of it as a...

Sabat

It's not necessarily a dead end. The motivations of some earlier Andriessen have to do with de Volharding, street music having an aggressive political nature, and a very vibrant rhythmic sound. But the way in which that blended with early American repetition music to result in what Kyle Gann calls Post-Minimalism – I have trouble putting my finger on anything of interest to me in that. I am sure there are other people who see it as a positive development.

Veza

Do you think it was simply made into something marketable?

Sabat

That might have been one motivation.

Veza

Maybe that is why it is so successful. Because it was made into something marketable, because the music needs to survive in a climate where there is very little funding.

Sabat

Well, certainly the notion that one should communicate about what one is doing is not at all bad. Cage "marketed" his own ideas, writing very fluidly and clearly about the motivations of what he did. For a long time this was thought of as silly or anti-musical, appearing on game shows and so on.

The American situation means you have to scramble for funding, and have to find ways of doing things that people will pay for. That includes public sources of funding like universities, going on tour, working with dance companies, or having a band. Think of all the things John Zorn has done, such a wide range of things to survive as a freelance composer-artist. That kind of diversity is not bad... Of course one can also see a negative side too, which I think is what you were driving at.

Vezza

I'm just playing devils advocate.

Sabat

Entirely relying on what people immediately respond to and are willing to pay for, as a source of funding the arts, leads to certain things emerging. Some can be really great, like various popular idioms that are driven by record sales. I would not say popular R&B and the way it emerged out of a market driven environment is bad. You cannot make those kinds of generalizations. Trying to take something esoteric, and finding ways of popularizing it can be problematic.

That is a little bit like Bang on a Can. It's like saying within, five years we want to turn new music, art music, experimental music, into something very popular. Maybe the push was too fast. Things have to evolve slowly. Commercial music evolved slowly, and it had many manifestations that we do not remember, because they are not interesting to us right now.

Vezza

And these markets do not think of themselves as institutions for research.

Sabat

It is not thought of as research. It's a different way of thinking. It is thinking of it as entertainment. I am not saying that the two cannot coexist, but I have always leaned more to the idea that music can be closer to philosophy and science, as well as being something that we enjoy the experience of.

There is one thing I want to say to your question about audience size. It comes out of an experience curating my own series, something I have done often. I did it in my studio when I first came to Berlin by putting on loft concerts. I always had a steady audience of thirty or so, which was all I could fit into my studio. This year I have started a series in an art gallery space in the middle of the Hackescher Höfe, a commercial environment. A glass windowed concrete cube, a space that shows architecture design and visual art. We started doing about nine shows over the course of the year. Since it was a small space the idea was to have only one performer. It is co-curated with visual artist, Mareike Lee and myself. Our premise was to have performers with a background of visual art, instrument building, sound art, new music composition, that whole range. So far we have done two shows, not much statistically, but both shows were quite packed. Part of the rationale is that each of these different worlds bring a circle with it. A lot of people are doing experimental work in different ways. Not just writing music, but improvising music, creating sound experiments, making visual art that is sound based, and so on. Within all of these worlds are strong small international fan bases, and they will show up for something. That is another idea towards the audience. It is not the mass audience, it is a collection of specialized audiences. One can provide a situation where over the course of a year various directions in the experimental scene show up. Local fans of each individual artist come and a few others who have been there a few times who like the environment, or they know me, or they know one of the other artists. That is one way to build a very interesting diverse audience. It is not locked into one direction or definition.

Vezza

Do you think there is a type of venue loyalty that goes on?

Sabat

It could be. People do move around. I go to different kinds of venues. I could be at any number of small places, or in more official places like Radialsystem V. The scene in Berlin has events in ballhouses, in regular concert halls, in people's lofts. You have to hear about it. The more you find out about it, the more you go. Of course there are all these tribal things as well. People find that they can do well at Miss Micks so they will have a series there. Certain types of people go there, and so on... Sometimes you have to push yourself and try out the next venue.

The scene in Berlin has a certain kind of fluidity. Even though it often only goes so far, you know – like Ultraschall this year. There was a theme. It was providing attention to those composers who twenty years ago belonged to the East Germans. Of course, now they do not exist as East Germans but they continue working. They were part of something that was localized, so it is a local scene twenty years after. It was an exploration of that scene in post facto. Of course, that is not something that is going to interest everybody, but certainly there are some things that I heard that I would not have otherwise.

Vezza

When did you start working with art installations, and visual artists?

Sabat

I believe strongly that this idea of music as research is connected to the fact that music is part of our art in general. That does not mean all music is art, and it does not mean all music belongs as part of art, just that the larger field of what is still thought of as “visual” art, in most cases, by now incorporates all kinds of media that have nothing to do with the purely visual. It has to do with conceptual performance, with spoken word, with plastic objects, with sound, with space, with ideas that are expressed in other media, with experimental film, video and so on. There are points of connection there, that for me personally, I like to relate to my own work.

When I was at Solitude I collaborated on a number of occasions with artists, making a video, on certain pieces which were performative, functioning also as a visual art performance. One of those pieces was called *Change In Your Pocket*. It was myself performing with a delayed image and sound of me set in a particular way, looking a particular way, wearing a shirt in a particular way. There is a correlation in that piece with various concepts, of how the sound is constructed. The sound of a single violin string is splintered into its spectral components. The image creates a certain kind of framing of various moving body parts that create the physical action of playing. It creates a displacement. Finding the necessity within certain pieces or certain musical ideas to present the sound in a different manner has led me to doing that. Sometimes the work is best presented as a film, or a video, or a piece where people can take it in as a sculpture over time. The piece I did for Donaueschingen lasts the whole festival, over three days.

Vezza

wave piano scenery player.

Sabat

I was concerned with something we were discussing with Yoav Pasovsky the other day, a composition based on laying out a field of possibilities. We were talking about it in terms of Etudes. In *wave piano scenery player* I was interested in drawing analogies between the field of pitches on the piano and the possibility of connecting them in a strict harmonic manner that you could model using just intonation. I did a lot of computer analysis over the course of a year and found various ways in which one pitch would lead to another in order to connect the tones on the piano. That eventually led to series of regions, chords, and possibilities. These are then chosen from and made musical, all in real time, partly by a computer, partly by a musician. You can do it very fast and blindingly, only audible as a large scale form, you can do it at a medium level, in which it sounds closest to 1950s serial music, and you can do it very slowly, where it becomes very harmonious and much more perceptible to the ear. I wanted to present those three scales of perception, and only a long period of time would allow that. That is what led to that situation. The key for me is that every situation is different. I am not interested in having a particular compositional style, but rather in addressing certain ideas I think are interesting, and finding the right forms to do that with. If that means something which is using microtunings and acoustic instruments, that is fine, if in another piece it involves a computer, that is fine too.

Veza

Were you also doing projects like this in Canada?

Sabat

I was doing some work that precedes this in Canada. The type of work I do now, started to mature at Solitude and afterwards. The pieces between 1993 and 1997, which I still have in my catalogue, hint at some of these ideas. I was at the start of the curve then.

Veza

Was it harder or easier to find people to collaborate with in Berlin than Canada or the States?

Sabat

In Canada there was a strong supportive community of artists I tended to work with. At the time I was performing more than I do now, which changes the focus. Recently, I lived in California for a year teaching at Cal Arts. I found a fantastic openness among the young artists there, and a big range of influences, much freer than some of the things one encounters here. Perhaps you can see the flip side of the lack of funding. There, it is normal to work as an open source developer, which means somehow you have got to pay for your life, you do it, we all do it, and then you do what you do, because you really want to do it your own way.

That gives you freedom because you are not going to waste your time doing something you think ought to be a certain way and isn't. You focus on doing it the way you want. Of course, that can also lead to hobby thinking which is not always the most interesting. But I had the impression from the people I encountered at Cal Arts that there was a great openness in working with electronic media. The people

working with circuit bending and electronics were very open. Also in the notion of what kinds of listening were possible. In terms of actual composed music, perhaps the difficulties that we talked about earlier were there. The Post-Minimalism does show its toll.

Every place I have been I found people with interesting ideas. I would not say it is that much better in Berlin. That is something I would not distinguish by place.

Veza

What are you asked to do more of here, instrumental music, sound installations, or other projects?

Sabat

Instrumental music is what I have been working on most recently. Right now I am working on several pieces for small to medium size ensembles.

It varies on the flow of time. When I first came to Germany I was still doing more performing, which I am doing very little of now. I was also doing some solo concerts and some people were writing music for me like Walter Zimmermann and Ernstalbrecht Stiebler. I was also performing Cage and Feldman. Since I am doing less of that, I am also asked to do less. Lately, there have been various situations where I have publicly presented installation type works in bigger festivals like MaerzMusik or Donaueschingen...

Veza

Did they approach you with a project or did you approach them?

Sabat

It's a mix. Curators get to know what you do, especially if you are doing a range of things. In the case of MaerzMusik, I had some contact with Matthias Osterwald and eventually we did a studio visit. I was also doing some collaborations with my brother, Peter Sabat. We both met with Matthias, and talked about various things. He was interested in a number of projects. He felt like one in particular would fit in his next festival. The focus came partly because he had a certain curatorial concept already at work and the piece as he saw it could fit within that idea.

Donaueschingen came about more because of a clear proposal of a specific idea. It was a concept that grew out of an instrumental piece for piano and computer called *Artificial Music for Machines*. I had an idea together with the visual artist Lorenzo Pompa, whom I met during a residency at the Herrenhaus Edenkoben, an idea of how that piece could function as a sculpture. We wrote it up and Armin Köhler looked at the proposal. I had had some contact with him before but not it wasn't extensive. Several months later he sent an email saying he would like to do this at Donaueschingen. There was little negotiation involved. It is either a studio visit or a clear presentation of a project. Things tend to emerge on that level for me.

Veza

Do you ever get approached with a set theme for a concert or a festival, and then asked to write music or a make an instillation around that theme?

Sabat

I have worked on a couple of projects like that. There was a piece from Lucia Mense in Cologne. She approached me directly and said: I understand that you have worked with tuning in interesting ways, could you do something for me with recorders and electronics? There was another one from Matthias Kaul who was doing a performance with Trio l'Art pour l'Art for the Festival Mouvement in Saarbrücken. He simply said: "we would like to do something with you". We knew each other indirectly through Hat Art, the label where we both had recorded projects related to James Tenney's music. Kaul's project did not have any thematic requirements. Right now I am working on that piece with a visual artist who is a text performer. I am working with a textual analysis of his recorded voice.

Regarding the earlier question you said about a theme, a project that is emerging right now came up in that way from a composer colleague who knows my work. He works in quite a different way from me, but at the same time he said – wouldn't it be interesting if we all were to work with Machaut in a way? You, me, and this other guy that I know – When he said that I thought that it could be interesting. I could really imagine doing that because I am quite interested in certain aspects of early music. Not only from the tuning perspective but also construction, and how the music works.

Veza

Has anyone ever approached you with a project and you turned it down?

Sabat

I have been approached with an idea that I thought was good but did not feel I could do anything with it at that time. I had to turn it down. When I first came to Berlin I was working in a very specific way, and I was asked if I could do something with a certain ensemble. I loved that ensemble, but after thinking about it for a few months I thought the type of things that I want to work with requires a certain kind of precision. The ensemble is a bit looser in the way they work and I did not see an interesting way for me to work with them.

Sometimes, in certain circumstances you do not find a way of working that you can feel good about and then of course, you have to say sorry.

Veza

Do you ever feel to restricted by a theme? Like you are compromising something because you have to work within a subject, and you cannot go in a certain direction because of the limitations?

Sabat

It depends on how the theme has been placed. There is an invitation sitting in my email box from all of us that were involved with Solitude. I have not yet responded to it. They are having an anniversary series with four different concerts. One of them appeals to me quite a lot, working with Neue Vocalisten from Stuttgart, an excellent vocal group. Everybody has a two-minute restriction so they are miniatures, which I am fine with, but the piece has to begin and end with the Tristan Chord. I find that not particularly interesting. The idea is clear because each piece begins and ends with the same chord, creating this chain of beats. When they perform it they always begin and

end at the same place somehow. I do not know how interesting that will be when there are fifty of them.

Veza

That's a lot of Tristan Chords.

Marc Sabat

Yes, that is a lot of Tristan Chords, but I do not feel like it is unmanageable. One can find a way to make it interesting, but it gives a certain slant to the idea. The idea is taking the Tristan Chord because it is supposed to exemplify ambiguous tonality, the beginnings of "neue musik". That is a political idea, one which maybe is super uninteresting right now. What we were discussing with Yoav, pitches and microtonality, that completely turns this point of view on its head. Of course, one could find a way into it without the political idea, but it still has politics built in, and ones which I don't like to be forced into accepting or rejecting.

Veza

Is there a lot of friction between people who are choosing what themes they want for a concert and the composers that they ask to participate? Do composers ever say I really want to do this project, but why did you choose this theme?

Sabat

It is an historical situation. The fact that somebody is paying for what we do. Bach was asked to write music to put Goldberg to sleep. Somebody else always thinks it is a good idea. A wonderful creative effort can completely transfigure these restrictions into something fantastic, like the *Musical Offering*, what a great way of doing that. There was one project last year that was a little bit in that vein, the Ensemble Modern Istanbul project. I cannot remember the details but there was a project where a number of people were given a period of time for a residency in Istanbul, and had to write a piece in response to it. There was a Russian and a German and so on.

It might be interesting to ask those composers how they felt because its strong overarching theme. It had an obvious and clear agenda, trying to dramatize the current fundamental struggles between religious ideologies. The project was trying to dramatize musical works based on a topical theme. This can seem exciting in the year it was done, and twenty years later you sort of scratch your head.

Veza

It could seem like a total cliché.

Sabat

That is entirely possible, like a moon landing symphony.

It depends on the turn you give it. If you take the King's theme and turn it into a super critical look at the chromatic scale, like Bach did, it can be fantastic. The fact that he has all these different canons, endless canons, and things upside down. Something that can reconfigure in a million ways. Shakespeare managed to do that with his history plays. They are such great pieces of drama. They were of course topical at the time, telling recent histories like Queen Elizabeth's dad.

Veza

More constrictions can be a good thing.

Sabat

As artists that is a part of what we do.

Veza

It helps you find creative ways out of being cliché, or being yourself in a cliché way.

Sabat

The endless field of possibilities is always focused by some kind of thinking along those lines. It is never arbitrary, and in the end it comes directly into certain things that recur in the course of ones' own work. That is definitely the case, but I guess I would not accept a project with a theme that I felt I could not work with. Part of the challenge is to ask yourself those questions. Maybe there is a way to turn restrictions into something interesting.

For example, I was very interested in questions of tuning and harmony, but I had to deal with the piano. I found a solution. I left the piano just as it was and the work was entirely about harmonic relationships. You are never forced into something. There is always another way of thinking about it, but it requires mental research to get to that point.

So from your point of view, there is something really different in Europe as opposed to the States or...

Veza

I think there is something very different in terms of music...

Sabat

Music that is being made?

Veza

Music that is being made, how people are thinking about it, what function they feel it plays, but I think the idea of research that you were talking about is interesting. Most research is publicly funded because it is a public service.

Sabat

That is correct.

Veza

In America it is not looked at as a public service, as something that should be funded because the public should have access to it.

Sabat

That can have a significant effect: when the artists who think this way or believe that way have to also provide their work back to the public. The fact is, when we are honest about it, most of us are completely subsidized. It could be by a sponsor who is a dedicated person like Betty Freeman, or it can be through government grants, which means that all the taxpayers are paying. Whatever the case is, when we do this kind

of work that is being funded in this way, we have to also give it back to the people who paid for it. A lot of people have a certain kind of arrogance. They say, I am an artist therefore give me this money, but I still want to maintain my heavy copyrights and keep charging for things. They treat it as though it were any other commercial product, which it is not. One has to be really *konsequent* in how one thinks. Either you find a way to do it so that it really is being commercially funded, and then you operate creatively within that scene, or you accept that what you are doing really is a kind of publicly funded research. In that case you make the results of that research available and open.

Veza

Do you feel like you are playing a different role here than the role you played in North America? What has changed?

Sabat

It has changed for me gradually over the years. There was a point in time, friends of mine will verify this if you ask them, where I was opposed to public funding and had the attitude that one should make one's own way for support. This is part of the open source idea. You find a way of making enough space in your life to do your work, and you do it as freely as you can. Recently, I have come to think more and more that we cannot escape the public funding mechanisms. They are essentially good and need to be there, but that our response to those things has to be to give back.

That is a layer that has gone on top of this earlier thinking. How that affected where I was ten or fifteen years ago? I would probably be lying if I told you because it is very hard to recall it clearly. When I was living in Toronto, I was in my early twenties. I was at a stage where you are barely out of school, no one really knows who you are, you are scrambling to get any kind of funding, any grants, any places to play, and any places to have your music played. Those are always the facts of being young and involved in a very small scene. You are competing with people who are in their forties, fifties, and sixties, and you realize they are applying for grants as well. And you are thinking, they are established, how come they are getting money and I'm not? They should be supporting young people. I remember thinking that way. I remember feeling like the grants were very much skewed in favor of established artists. That was my perspective at that time because it was hard to get anything going. Now I see things a little bit differently, and realize that it does not necessarily get that much easier as an artist when you get a little bit older, especially if you want to maintain a certain kind of independent position, which I strongly value. That is one perspective that has changed.

Veza

You mean an aesthetically independent position?

Sabat

I mean it is a fact of life. If you have to produce a lot of pieces for a lot of official situations, then those pieces are composed under pressure and time constraints. You tend to borrow from yourself more and more to get the stuff done quickly. Often people will take the clarinet part of their last piece from two years ago, and copy and transpose it a bit, and that is their new piece. That is absolutely fine, why not do that? That is something that happens partly by having your work grow sideways. People

say I came up with a lot of great stuff in that piece and it still has not been fully explored, and why not pull out that part of the piece and show it? That is fine, but it is also a part of the circumstance of time pressure, and having no better solution about what to do. If you never work in those contexts it is a shame. It is good to have a piece in the big festivals. It is good to work with famous groups. It is also important to work with small groups, young musicians, and people all over the place in different ways. The more you do that, the broader your work can be.

Veza

Do you feel like you fit in more in Berlin?

Sabat

No, but fitting in has never been something that I have been looking for. The feeling of fitting in, being hip, always makes me a little bit uneasy. I always question why I'm being pulled into this club or that club. I do not like that feeling. Being an insider is not necessarily a positive thing. Being involved in a community can be a positive thing. There are certain reasons that I do feel like I'm at home here, other than just having lived here for a long time. There are people who as individuals I respect a lot, who are here, who are friends. There is a feeling of being able to move around between many different scenes, which is a little bit easier here than it was in Canada. In the States to survive, you have to be attached to an institution or a university. It is much harder to be an independent composer unless you really like touring, giving lectures at the universities, working with a dance company, playing with your own band, or doing commercial music. The ability to freely move between lots of little things but staying within a freelance artistic way of thinking is another thing that makes me feel at home.

There is also my own family history. My parents were born in the Ukraine. They were born in East Europe 120 miles from here. They came over in the 1940s to Canada where I was born and grew up. I have a Canadian perspective from my education, and from my upbringing, but the Ukrainian language and culture I learned as a child does not come far from this area. I do not feel like I just jumped into some place where I do not belong. I feel like my connections and family history are more European.

Veza

Well, I think that is good.

Sabat

Okay.

Veza

Yeah, thanks Marc.

Sabat

Thank you.