

Jerome Porsperger's website is a cave of inspiration. It traces 8 years of work which pitches what he does somewhere between DJ consort and connoisseur conductor. He's is happy to be invited to spin a musical story for children about the works of Schubert – he did this in 2007. He's also no stranger to Brussels' famous music halls, to name a few include Botanique, Bozar, and Wiels contemporary art museum.

Outside of these buildings his musical playground includes a Carrefour supermarket's carpark and a busy highway intersection. There's 11 categories in all detailing his residences, performances, art videos, artworks, recitals, press, public reactions, experimental sound, future invisible places and scores. I met up with him at a cafe called Maison du Purple in the artisan district called Saint Gilles in Brussels. Here's what he told (OO) about Mozart, his desires to link music with the atmosphere of landscape and what it feels like to conduct a score whilst in a rowing boat heading off down Halong Bay, Vietnam.



Opening Act: Place / Act Two: Passion /
Act Three: Fear / Act Four: Artifice / Final Act: Explore

<http://www.leconcertinvisible.com/>

Opening Act:
Place

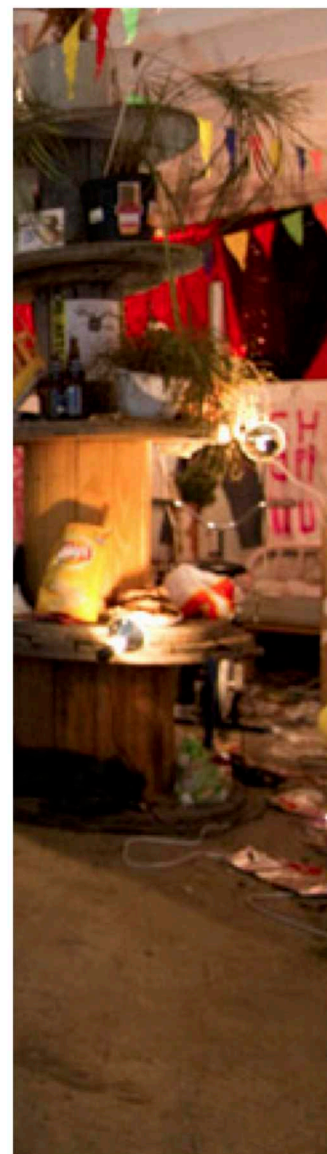
In the category Future Invisible Places you show a miscellany of photos. There's an oil tanker, cruise liner, a park in cherry blossom bloom, a smog-drenched traffic jam in India, even the site of a rubbish dump, and then some famous monuments of the world. So, how does place influence your artform, and which Future Invisible Places are on your radar right now?

So, On influences—

I performed a score of Wagner for the festival called Attack which happens in Italy annually. One week before the festival performance I really didn't know how I was going to roll out the piece as a performance. But that uncertainty become part of the performance. The energy that comes with not knowing kept the piece new and alive. I like working this way – responding to the place, discovering a place and looking for something new – waiting for a snippet of inspiration to catch me – in mind, by thought, in vision, by sound.

In Italy a snippet from a score by Wagner happened to catch me, and also a birds mask which was sitting the apartment where I was staying. These two things came together just a few days before the performance. I wore the mask whilst performing the score standing at the summit of the Sibillini mountains. I'd simply mentioned that I wanted to go explore the Sibillini mountains to the organiser of the festival, and he arranged for us to go record the video.

I wanted to do the piece for the Attack festival this way because I had read in Wagner's diaries that his inspiration to write the Tannhauser Overture came from his experience of being high up in the Sibillini mountains. Although a German-born composer he was also in search of other influences to inform his music.



And, On Traditions—



Today many of the institutions which program opera and orchestral overtures don't see the musical score as anything more than a printed sheet of music. It is! But, and there is a but..! Treating the score as a holly grail and the great composers as unlikely gods, the talent of individual musicians is not being recognised. Equally, composers are being brought in to train the musicians in orchestras to quietly play a score with technical perfection. The ability to play a piece technically well is favoured over interpretation which can sometimes create unexpected flaws in the compositions.

For the classically trained musician – which I am – employing technique alone leaves a score barren of feeling. Feeling comes to a score only when each member of an orchestra puts in all they've got – emotionally. Together with the right composer, orchestras should breathe life into the score – tapping into its organism – to discover its emotional state. So institutions need to ensure that orchestras and conductors both have sufficient time to get into the score to reveal its heart, soul, – it's guts. It's messy beginnings!! Many of the great composers' biographies reveal that they conceived their best works by embracing the filth – the life of the piece.

When I do my own performances I think about what's happening in my life at that moment. It infects the piece. Positive or not, it's all part of illuminating the performance. For Le Concert Invisible there are many factors I play with. Playing with the fidelity of the sound is one of them. Reviews of my performances have said that 'Porsperger likes to play to the culture of the people surrounding the event.' There's an ambient soundtrack of existing sounds of the immediate environment – so I like to embrace, even amplify them, rather than mute them. They symbolise the grime and toil of the day-to-day – that's why I embrace them. They add a messy layer to an otherwise technically perfect score.

A project I want to conduct is me hanging from a crane hitched-up so high that I'm just seen as a blip on the city's horizon . People will see (and hear) the performance from kilometers away. It's going to take between 5-10 years to realise it. But I'm dedicated to my artform so projecting ahead into the future is natural and I see my artform as evolving. I live for the buzz it creates and I think the audience feels this when they're watching a performance. Using the crane I'll be winched 500 ft high alongside 2 x 2kw boombox speakers. Just imagine how the wind will transform the sound.

Act Two:
Passion

**Watching the Video
Artwork titled Tosca I was interested in the choice of subtitling. At 0:39 seconds we get told that ‘the city is becoming a lavatory’, followed by ‘If this fucking priggishness doesn’t change’ 10 seconds later. These words seem to be a relentless barrage of criticism about city and institution. Do you think the city is the death-knell of all things beautiful and what do you want to say to priggish element who steal classical music for the elite and aristocratic?**

So, On Beauty–

Filth and grime is sensual. So for me that's a version of beauty too. If something affects you so much that it moves you then for me that's a definition of beauty. In reality this translates to blood, tears, flesh and shit. These are four things which make up real life and its no different the world where composers have been writing their musical scores. So we shouldn't wipe clean this prism-of-filth from classical music or operatic scores – simply because it makes good commercial sense.

Additionally there also exists a fleeting beauty. This comes from the conductor – spoken through their body movements. The conductor should be expected to bring a real life manifestation of a score to an audience. Doing this through being an editor of the aesthetic turns that surround a musical score.

When I'm staging performances in the city, in a boat, aircraft or from the balcony of a disused building, what I'm doing is transforming the image people have in their imagination of what a conductor looks like. Also where they perform and how they behave. I'm also questioning the value of the performance hall space. There's no reason that a conductor should be stood in a dinner suit commanding an orchestra in a concert hall space. That image is simply a benign one, based on bourgeois ritual. That kind of conventional respectability simply diverts people from discovering the real passion locked in scores of classic music.



And, On Priggishness–

During a residency at LOBE, Canada last year I realised a squat as a temple for Mozart. It was a 3 month exhibit in an installation space of the museum. Why a temple-come-squat? Firstly, to break the image of a conductor who dresses up in a suit. Then to focus on Mozart's hedonism – he was a man, composed of fallible traits who didn't shy away from the tilt of being human and who infused this into his best compositions – celebrating life, not apologising for living it.

Then there is to show people that not all musicians are fixed in peddling the myth that all classical music is for the elite and aristocratic of society. There are plenty of liberated musicians who believe otherwise – they just need to find their voice as I have. What I'd created was a universe celebrating the odour of Mozart using an aesthetic pop-clash. Three words I used in the title of the installation are Atomic, Class and Sick. This title puts le classique next to the ugly. In the same space I put a plastic-bust of Mozart gluing to it a lock of artificial hair. There's a lot of wild visual detail in the installation which I added to drive people's imaginations. I hope they'll be thinking provocatively about what he, his music and the artform means to them.

I also used a typographic rendition done using a spray can to illustration the layout of a seated orchestra. I sprayed this onto the walls of the gallery space. I think the installation had an educative function expressing the traditions of classical music, but presents a new message in a modern way. Classical music is deep and dark and is part of the fabric of daily life and I wanted to link the two things. When I perform, and these two things are in place I start to feel the palms of my hands get wet. It's at times like this that I start to question again the images of velvet, angels, diamonds. About how these trinket images clean-up too much the sweat and odour that comes when I perform a score. I think the squat scenario sneers at these classical definitions and liberates the artform.

Reactions to my work are usually good. Someone said it brings a 'great humanization of the city, a soul to the city, after seeing you perform we look at the world with more humanity'. That's great! When I play in physical spaces as a DJ or conductor people can stay for an hour or leave after 5 minutes.



Act Three:
Fear

You seem to move about the city with the stealth of a Parkour freerunner, and celebrate and appreciate its architecture and open spaces. Some of your performances have been in disused public buildings and you have also sat so high in the rafters of a church that you disappear from view. I think this makes you a bit of a master of architect who is re-imagining people's relationship to the city. It seems as though Jerome Porsperger has no fear (at least of heights), and he wants to delete his ego from the performance. Discuss...

So, On Appreciation—

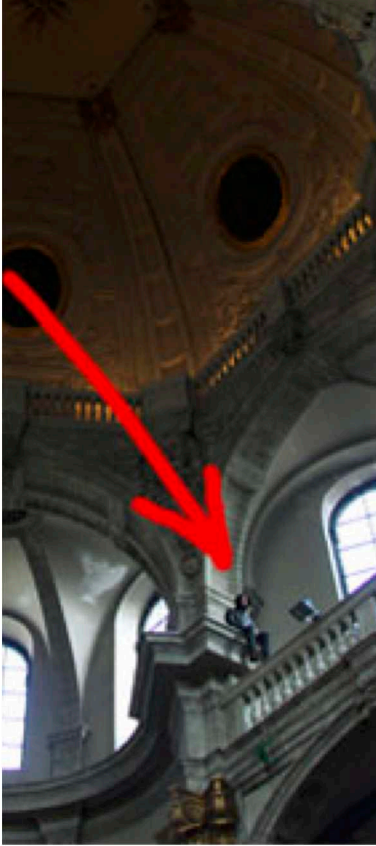
A street, a river, being in an aircraft, a train line. I like to use the places I visit to affect the flow of a score. I record a lot in the midst of landscapes. When I was in Vietnam I had an opportunity to do a tribute to Mahler's Death in Venice. This involved hiring a boat – me and a friend – and we took off down Halong Bay. The landscape around Halong bay has high rugged rock-faces, misty horizons and a fantastic palette of greys. The landscape was perfect for the piece. We had Mahler's 5th symphony paused and ready to play on my iPod. Me, a friend with Mahler – we were ready. We did this on our last few days in Vietnam and the score symbolizes a farewell so the situation was perfect in many ways.

Some performances simply can't happen without the help of friends. They're never seen in shot as they're usually the person left holding the camera. For this piece my friend was recording for 10 minutes as we meandered down Halong Bay to the rhythm of A-B-A. The signature A-B-A is how a score is structured. A = first part, B = transition, A = modified A. Wow!!! When the transition into B arrived – and you can see this in the video – we also loose the rocks to the bay! Perfect!! The score, the landscape – it all fits without technical edits – it's as if Mahler's 5th takes on the proportions of Halong Bay. No longer foreign to the place but part of it. So this piece really shows you the drama and demonstrates how the piece was only alive for that instant. This is the 'missed moment' – when it's over, all that is left is a trace of the performance captured in video. All classical performance should be aiming to achieve this missed moment.

In 2006 I collaborated with artist Alexander Weiss. We took to the streets of Brussels with an ambition to spread classical music. To do this we made flyers advertising our project, Cars and Composers. What we ended up with was a procession of hyper-styled cars with über-sized boomboxes in the boot. Boom!! B-o-o-oom!!! At a given time, they were instructed to turn-up at a location. Then tuning into a radio-wave frequency I transmitted the signal from the front car to the procession of vehicle behind. My role then was to mix a performance of classical musical from the front car.

What we had created was project bridging high and low culture – classical and hip-hip. And as with all projects which mix low and high culture at street level local and national news channels start to get interested. I suppose we created a little bit of chaos – or energy – in the city.





And, On Ego—

I'm not really a showman, I am a performer. I perform the layers of the score. And because I might be outdoors doing this I'll just wear clothes that are practical. In winter that'll be a big jacket, in summertime a pair of shorts. There's a nomadic journeyman about how I approach to my artform. What I'm doing is taking classical music to places. And this involves a lot of travelling around. So I get to meet a lot of people and the ones who like what I do offer to help out in some way possible.

There's little need for costumes, suits, a specially tailored outfit. For the Attack festival I did wear a mask and that's because I got fixated on it and I kept thinking to myself 'I have to do something with that mask'. Until eventually I gave into that nagging sensation and so you see me wearing it in the video that accompanied the performance. My attitude towards conducting is that I am a passeur-de-music. And I use objects and facades to reveal and conceal my body. I'm a conduit, transmitting the essence of a score.

I have an ambition to put classical music in more unexpected places. In 5 –10 years time I imagine to have built an opera in the jungle (laughs), but seriously, it's to bring multiple real lives together. Is that egoistic? Maybe. The Franco-Belgian violinist and composer Friedrich 'Fritz' Kreisler is an inspiration.



So, On Language—

I'm not militant against institutions – I understand limitations they work within. But I am happy to intrude on a mono-culture that puts classical music in the box of a concert hall space.

The concert hall in Brussels' Bozar has an amazing technical set-up and produces a sound experience of sonic-perfection. Some composers rely too much on the mechanics of the technology and miss the messy organic layers that need to be discovered underneath the written language of the score. Music is organic – it's life.

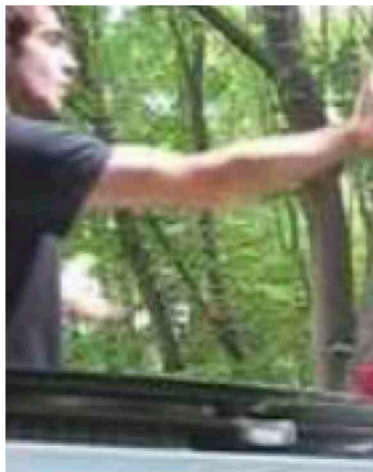
Fact: the score is just a language so it can easily be read by all conductors equally. Fact: these scores come from the same piece played over and over again. So, fact of fable? A good conductor feels the notes – consumes them – and then allows the orchestra to offer the piece to a gathered audience with a new explanation – an explanation of life itself? It's a big idea, I know.

Acting as editors, all conductors should make it their mission to create experiences – a series of missed moment – for audiences. There have been many missed moment in the past. During the 1960s and 1970s prodigious conductors like Bernstein went deep into the music and made sure of that.

Missed moments are an important feature of my work. And a way in which I trace these missed moments is by visualising them in video art pieces. This is happening in as part of the Classic Turntable series of compositions. To create these I use a turntable to create moments in situations never to happen again.

I'm using video to capture the beauty of a location as much as I am to document traces of my activity. There's less control of the performance in what I'm doing today and I'm seeing what I do evolve as I watch back traces of the work. Reviewing the work I'm able to see how my body moves and use this to instigate more spontaneous approach to using expressions of visual language. There's a few days labour at least for just capturing a 10 minute performance of a score. I like to assimilate a score over a few days – digesting it – then in the landscape I simply respond to whats happening.

Act Four:
Artifice



And, On Aesthetic—

I like to exaggerate the public performances and equally the ones captured as traces on video. Usually this is achieved by boosting colours and exaggerating contrasts. I did this for the Wagner video piece with footage originally captured on a canon powershot. That's my only capture device and it travels with me everywhere I go. It's my only capture device. I really do want to use more video effects. I am working on a project about my body and want to create an experience which shows me conducting in multiplicate, delayed and undulated. I'm looking for someone who works with video to help me make that project happen.

Typography also features in the performances. When I was in Venice I used the language of street art to tag some of the city's walls with the words Viva Verdi! More legitimately I was commissioned to compose some funny posters of imaginery notations. They show famous classical melodies and people are invited to guess the music.

Personally I'm moved by the visual which comes as part of classical music. One strong moment was when I wanted to pay tribute to the composer Mozart. It was at the time I was doing the residency in Canada. I just wanted to make a grand gesture to his legacy. Until then I had been putting stones in all the places I'd travelled to – all over the world. I used the stones to symbolise that idea of there being no grave for Mozart – he's buried in a common grave and we don't have his body. So the scattering of stones seemed befitting.

So I was able to make the grand statement with the help of a friend who I met when I was there in Canada. When I was explaining my ambitions for making a tribute to Mozart, he simply told me that he had a stone I could use. The difference with this stone is that it was granite – an un-etched monolithic tombstone. And he said that "If you want it you can have it". Just pay for the words to be printed. So I paid \$100. I didn't choose a type that was full of – you know – (he waves his conductors arms about) conducting type. Mozart had a scatological humour and would sign his name in the letters TRAZOM – like holding a mirror up to his own name.



Final Act:
Explore

Discover up coming
performances and about
the artist Jerome Porsberger
at his archive site
Le Concert Invisible.

*Interview. concept and design by
Paul Wright, Design Critic and author
of Langage Art blog oolaaa.be*

<http://www.leconcertinvisible.com/>