**Wolfgang Mitterer** (1958—)

Aaron Cassidy

Photo: <http://www.wolfgangmitterer.at/pics_db/portrait_1.jpg>

**Wolfgang Mitterer** is an Austrian composer and organist noted in particular for his work with live electronics and improvisation. Born 6 June 1958 in Lienz, East Tyrol, Mitterer studied organ and composition at the University of Music and the Performing Arts Vienna, followed by a yearlong residency at the studio for electroacoustic music (EMS) in Stockholm.

An exceptionally prolific composer, Mitterer’s output spans a staggeringly broad range of approaches to music-making, including works for tape, chamber music of various formations, experimental pop songs (*Sopop*), works for large orchestra, music for theatre and opera, music for film, and sprawling site-specific installations and [performance events](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNATs59XlNA) (*turmbau zu babel*, for example, is scored for 4200 singers, 22 drums, 48 brass players and 8-channel-tape; *vertical silence* entails 4 DJs, 4 actors, fire brigade, motor bikes, brass band, children's choir, 3 opera singers, 2 excavators, 1 truck, hunters, power saws, and tapes; *horizontal noise* requires “bass clarinet, electronics, brass band, children's choir, 3 sopranos, 10 drummer, 40 women, 10 woodmen, 3 actors, 6 animal actors, vacuum cleaner, police, etc.”[[1]](#footnote-1)). His [works list](http://www.wolfgangmitterer.com/en/compositions) includes over 200 entries and demonstrates a particularly catholic, pluralistic, non-dogmatic approach to instrumentation, duration, venue, scale, and function.

Despite this diversity, Mitterer’s work maintains several important central trends and tendencies. Stylistically, the music is often characterised by layers of crackles, twitches, clicks, and pops, both electronic and acoustic, with a rustling, flickering, chirping, gestural energy. These more fragmented, granular layers are quite often combined with more gradual, elongated, atmospheric, lyrical material, though generally a sense of instability and unpredictability remains. Mitterer’s works for larger forces often explore a regularity of pulsation and repetition, as in *Konzert für Klavier, Orchester und Electronics* (2001) or *Mobile Beats* (2011).

Reference pervades Mitterer’s work, whether through quotation, modelling, or implication. Works such as the organ solo *bwv.org* (2000) or *inwendig losgelöst* (2006), for Baroque orchestra, ensemble, and electronics, include direct, historical quotations (of Bach and Telemann, respectively), but more subtly veiled or ambiguous references are more common, as in *Im Sturm* (2004/07 <link to mp3?>) for baritone, prepared piano and electronics, a Schubertian song cycle in which the line between real and imagined Schubert is unclear (is this Mitterer in the style of Schubert, is it Schubert with Mitterer overlaid?). The lines between deconstruction and mimicry and myth are constantly smudged, erased, covered up, and redrawn. More general stylistic references are similarly common, including hints of pop electronica and various forms of jazz.

Much of Mitterer’s work, both as a composer and as a performer, focuses on improvisation. His notated works frequently integrate improvisational passages and often use electronic and recorded material gathered in free improvisation sessions. *Coloured Noise* (2005), for example, includes several layers of improvisation: the members of the ensemble are given improvisation windows in their scores (indicated with dashed lines in the score excerpt below <p5?>), with only instrumentation and relative duration indicated; the tape part is comprised entirely of recordings compiled from free improvisation projects with other musicians (again, a form of reference); and Mitterer’s own overlaid organ solo is almost entirely improvised, with only loose, notated mnemonic triggers.[[2]](#footnote-2) As an organist, Mitterer is widely active as an improviser, both as a [soloist](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4il1anF2t8) and in free improvisation collectives. His improvisational work typically combines acoustic and electronic materials.

**References and further reading**

Wolfgang Mitterer, Music Information Center Austria, <http://db.musicaustria.at/en/node/60315>

Wolfgang Mitterer  
[http://www.wolfgangmitterer.at/](http://www.wolfgangmitterer.at/%20)

A video interview discussing workflow with various screen shots and examples: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=assxs7WP_KU>

**List of works**

A complete [list of works](http://www.wolfgangmitterer.com/en/compositions) and [discography](http://www.wolfgangmitterer.com/de/discography), far too extensive to reprint here, can be found on Wolfgang Mitterer’s website. Notable recordings include:

*coloured noise* (2006), Wolfgang Mitterer, organ; Klangforum Wien; Peter Rundel. Kairos 0012592KAI

*42nd Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik Darmstadt 2004 – Wolfgang Mitterer* (2006) Wolfgang Mitterer, organ and electronics (live recording). col legno WWE 1SACD 20615

*Im Sturm “dein! Dein ist mein herz!”* (2008) Georg Nigl, baritone; Wolfgang Mitterer, prepared piano and electronics. col legno WWE 1CD 20278

*Donaueschinger Musiktage 2006, vol. 3 – Martin Smolka, Wolfgang Mitterer* (2007) Wolfgang Mitterer, turntables; Freiburger Barockorchester; ensemble recherche; Lucas Vis, conductor; EXPERIMENTALSTUDIO für akustische Kunst, Freiburg. NEOS 10726

1. <http://www.wolfgangmitterer.com/en/compositions> (accessed 12 June 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Weidringer, Walter, “Insights into Wolfgang Mitterer’s *coloured noise: brachial symphony for 23 musicians and electronics.”* Kairos 0012592KAI, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)