ROTHKAMM Hollywood Studio 1999
destroyed in Californina Witch Fire 2007

Fabrice & Philippe: **Where do you come from and what is your background ?**

Frank: I was born in Germany in the town of Gütersloh, where the British Royal Air Force had a base. On my way to elementary school I passed by the military housing units every day and heard my first words in English. My first instrument was the recorder and I went to these group lessons and learned how to read and write music, but I really wanted to play the piano, so when my parents finally acquired one I figured out how to hold the sustain pedal and hit as many bass notes as possible. This was my first "synthesis" and the auditory effect it had on me was very profound. Then I took piano lessons. For the first year I had a teacher at a "modern" music school, where the lessons took place in a room filled with electric organs and electric pianos and everybody played while wearing a huge pair of headphones. The teacher would go around and listen in to what you're playing and correct it. I did not like this one bit, but of course I now realize that is how I first got to play on electric keyboard instruments from the 1970s and some of the organ presets were actually very unique. My family moved then to the small town of Nürtingen in Southern Germany and because of my accent I was a bit of an outsider and stayed home and took my drawings more seriously. I had just discovered perspective and how you can create optical illusions. At the age of 12 I started to compose music, which was first done in a very basic classical style, so basic in fact I remember the first "leitmotif" to this day. After hearing Paul Hindemith on the radio I eventually abandoned all forms of traditional notation and developed a graphic system of my own. In 1980 we moved to Moers, a city by the Rhine River north of Düsseldorf. I continued to study piano, eventually adding the violin and Harmonielehre (study of harmony), but my real interest was now in electronic music. I borrowed a lot of books from my local library and from what I read and saw in the pictures I somehow built my own "sampling" system around a UHER reel-to-reel tape machine. I was 16 years old. During the following 2 years I would then compose what is now known as 'Moers Works'.

Fabrice & Philippe: **What do you think of avant-garde electronic music and where do you put yourself in that rich history ? Do you think there could be a link between your own work and early electronic experiments like WDR studio era for instance ?**

Frank: Early on I was confused about the dichotomy or the "conflict" between the French and German studios at the dawn of electronic music. All the books about electronic music that I read always contrasted the free association of "Musique Concrete" with the strict serialism of "Elektronische Musik", as if they are mutually exclusive. There was a lot of ideology involved with the creation of music made directly on tape because of the tendency of post-war modernism to make a complete break with the past and to usher in the new atomic age. So, right from the start my own work was infused with history and its dialectical movement. I am particularly fascinated by the *craft* involved in constructing these early experiments. It took them many hours to produce a few seconds of music. Each sound and sound effect had to be created one note a time. The mechanics were very labor-intensive. So from 2002-2006 I consciously re-enacted the modernist break towards my own work and adopted the anti-economical method, where the recording of the actual sound takes a tiny fraction of time compared to the enormous task involved of preparation and editing.

Fabrice & Philippe: Reading some of your declarations we wondered if you deliberately obliterate recent evolutions of electronic music. Is this true ?

Frank: That is true, because there is no such thing as 'evolution' in music. However there is an illusion in society, perhaps linked to 19th century concepts of Hegelian History or Manifest Destiny, that culture is moving to a higher plateau and that progress is being made. So, the engine that drives the economy is thought to be the same as that driving aesthetics and culture. The dominant illusion is that avant-garde music is the history of notation, that it started monophonic and evolved into ever more complex sounds resulting in today's holy trinity of instrumental farts, extended techniques and laptop errors. The dominant illusion in traditional music is the constant restoration of the past, the obsession to worship and re-enact the canon of masterpieces, which is in actuality a form of Cultural Pessimism, as it replaces the future with the past. So the works that I release are deliberately made to revolutionize time and genre: they are poly-temporal and non-economic and are located in the interior or at the border between categories; they are located on the inside of the dialectical movement of history. Basically, the target of my life's work is not only the obliteration of recent evolutions, but the critique of Totalization itself. As the works are always situated within real society, my output is not art, but simply a non-surplus-generating commodity. As Adorno put it: "Whoever submits to dialectical discipline, must unquestionably pay with the bitter sacrifice of the qualitative polyvalence of experience." That's a bummer. But I feel that just as society has to break its dependence on a single source of depleting energy, so aesthetics, and with it music, will have to do the same.

Fabrice & Philippe: Why a young composer like you chose to work almost solely on vintage computers and outdated technology ? Do you sometimes play on laptops ?

Frank: Unfortunately, I'm not that young unless you consider 43 the new 23. I work on vintage computers because they have no real exchange value in today's society, they have unique Digital-to-Analog-Converters, they are carriers of history and are easy to find in thrift stores and junk shops. This is almost like archeology: "Let's see how far this little object will carry me". Technology and aesthetics are only outdated if they are no longer useful or are no longer a praxis. And yes, I use laptops, but since I suffer from Repetitive Strain Injury, it's more comfortable for me to use a traditional desktop computer.

Fabrice & Philippe: Mathematics and algorithms seems to be at the root of your compositions. Are constraints an essential part of your way of composing ? Is it a kind of obsession for you ?

Frank: Yes, limitations are fundamental. We like to think of our world as limitless, that resources and the imagination have no limits; that you can be everything you want to be. This of course is a collective illusion. Humans are defined by their limitations as is the world and universe. By looking around one could even argue that the world must have been created by an imperfect demiurge, so we are created in the image of imperfection, we are fragments basically. So what I propose is a form of Post-human music, a music that knows about the design failures of humans and seeks to fundamentally reshape our DNA. Some of my works are aimed at the perception of future human beings, because for the most part I have faced incredible difficulty with today's humans just to get my work published & staged. Most of it remains unpublished and without a performance venue. People here in the U.S. take the validity of the monetary exchange system (and the stock market in particular) as axiomatic, so in the mathematical models that govern and represent our economy, in the random movement of stock prices, you see the same principles at work as in my music. And some of it is really just made up, with no current scientific basis whatsoever, like a kid in the land of make-believe.

Fabrice & Philippe: **Could you explain the role of algorithms and symmetry in your music?**

Frank: I can only say this: In 1986 while working at the University clinic lugging ill patents around, I came up with an algorithmic language that can be understood and executed by both machines and humans.

Fabrice & Philippe: **We've been astonished by the importance of scientific, philosophical and poetical thoughts about cybernetics in your records ? Are modernism,futurism, rapidity and speeding up just inspiring themes for you or do you consider those notions as the nucleus of your work ?**

Frank: As a form of "postmodern conceptual art", but really only a real operating commodity in today's markets, my albums have indeed many aspects: visual, sculptural, technical, textual and there is music involved. The nucleus of the work is shaped by my life within American society for the past 2 decades.

Fabrice & Philippe: **We were also quite impressed by the importance of space and time discrepancies in your work and your declarations for instance in LAX's booklet. Is it a kind of criticism of the evolutions of modern society ?**

Frank: Perception always shapes reality, ideology and ideas dominate and bend people's lives. LAX is a re-enactment of the Y2K phenomena that swept through Los Angeles from 1998-2000. It was a collective hallucination and illusion on a grand scale, with the U.S. government and corporations actually spending millions of dollars trying to fix an imaginary problem. It led to the development of what I call a 'parallel reality' in the LAX essay. At the time I had set up a super-sized computer music studio, to do lots of parallel computations. This included multiple customized Atari ST based ADAP systems, with huge hard-drive cases, you know, my version of a "supercomputer", which was made from old home computers. These were of course 'Y2K' safe, because the Atari did not have a system clock. As you can see (in the center of the image on page 1), the iMac is the only contemporary computer for the time, because I only used it to make money in the Dotcom industry. My computations all dealt with uniform random distributions, some I executed on an 'analog computer' which was constructed from sine wave generators which had to be operated by hand. The most intense machine computation (done in my Forth based IFORMM language and rendered in Csound) is in 'XFM OR New Encounter Architecture', where the dense piece is shaped like the parabolic theme building you see on the cover of the LAX CD. LAX basically 'moves to the extremes of culture and the culture to extremes' as it puts societies' illusions through computations based on the law of large numbers: the result is a new reality for the listener, a universal view. In 2005 I put all of this historic equipment into a house that was located on the estate of a friend of mine in Ramona, California, a town close to Borrego-Springs desert. I put it there because I ran out of money and moved back to New York. On October 23, 2007 all of it was destroyed in the California Witch Fire.

Fabrice & Philippe: **Is there a kind of continuity in your releases ? If so, which is it ?**

Frank: This is a very good question. I don't think that anybody could necessary identify the same person with all of my works and this situation will not improve as time goes on. I'm unable to stick to any particular style or method for long. I always thought that when I got older I would have found my style and place in history, but the years passed, I got old and I'm still waiting. I guess in the concurrency of all styles and the omnipresence of history is where I have dissolved myself. Perhaps the 32 part FB01 trilogy has the greatest amount of coherence: It lasts 1 hour 55 minutes and 41 seconds and is meant to be performed on a 3D sound system in 3 locations in one evening: FB01 before sunset on the water, FB02 exactly at sunset on a rooftop, and FB03 after sunset in a camera obscura.

Fabrice & Philippe: **Are you still using the IFORMM system as in the FB series ?**

No. The original hardware-based IFORMM system burned down in the Witch Fire last year.

Fabrice & Philippe: **How do humour and irony belong to your music? You're used to present different faces and play different roles. What's the aim of that? Is it a deliberate need for you to throw out listeners and to cloud the issue?**

Frank: Indeed, I use them to demonstrate pretentiousness, untalented self-importance, political correctness, gadget idolization, and state subsidized air pollution. What Marx did with Hegel, I propose to do with Stockhausen. Let's never forget what it is written in Das Kapital: "The mystification which dialectic suffers in … [Stockhausen's] hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."

Fabrice & Philippe: **Are you trying to mix serialism with popular culture? Could you explain to us your concept of sci-fi Serialism?**

Frank: To understand Sci-Fi Serialism it is necessary to contemplate first on the 3 principles of supermodernism: 1. Be utopian and scientific 2. Nod to the first pioneers 3. Make full use of left, right and phantom channel. Once these are fully comprehended, one may move on to the examination of science fiction and Serialism, which are different sides of the same coin: a) The invention of a science that does not yet exist leads to utopia, and b) Total Serialism leads to the parameterization of everything. Pop culture, on the other hand, is the best of all possible worlds at any moment in time. It is popular because it provides 'Wahrnehmungen' (sensations), either rhythmic or melodic, that are most agreeable to most people. Therefore, Sci-Fi Serialism aims at creating the utopia of the totality of perceptions, very much akin to the psychedelic experience.

Fabrice & Philippe: **Don't you think your records have a kind of music library feeling, your last one Just 3 organs in particular?**

Frank: Library Feeling! Yes, indeed. I am married to a librarian.

Fabrice & Philippe: **Do you sometimes work on functional music, for instance for movie pictures, experimental movies, for Hollywood, Stars Wars? We've noticed in your discography that you've released remix for some well-known musicians. Is it a regular activity for you?**

Frank: No, nothing has ever become a regular activity or career for me. I've done stuff with famous people and for Fortune 500 companies. But, everything appears just as a string of random occurrences, with my artistic and financial future uncertain.

Fabrice & Philippe: **Do you often play with bands or others musicians like Elliott Sharp, Alfred Harth in the past? Do you frequently practice improvisation?**

Frank: Very infrequently, but this September at the Ystad festival in Sweden, and in October at Harvestworks in New York, I will put together audio performances with Per Svensson, Hans Tammen and Derek Morton.

Fabrice & Philippe: **Your career appears to know a new takeoff since 2005. Could you tell us more of earlier periods which are totally unknown for us, especially the Mystery of the Leaping Fish, Planet Genius, Commercial Reel, Xtasea periods? Would it be too indiscreet to ask you what you are working on at this very moment?**

Frank: My experimental work was all but for the most part unpublished until 2005, when I was 40 years old. Since then 6 Compact Discs Albums (an outdated technology!) have been released, and I have fortunately gotten a lot of press for these. Many more albums are in the works. All of the early American samples are being reworked right now into a concept called 'FRANK GENIUS IS STAR STRUCK'. On July 2nd, my first Enhanced CD (which includes a short film and 102 page score) will be released. It is called "OPUS SPONGEBOBICUM". An article about me will be in the July issue of 'Electronic Musician' magazine. I'm also in middle of mastering an Enhanced CD called 'ALT' for the great Baskaru label in Paris, which will include a 8 panel photo work, which I still have to shoot. So, I'll go back to New York for some filming and location scouting. I have already found wonderful performance locations for LAX and JUST 3 ORGANS and will see how far I get.

At last how could you describe your music to a neophyte using 3 adjectives, 3 animals, 3 objects and 3 great figures?

Frank: I was hoping you would do that.