

# Fritz Hauser

Every now and then we, as musicians, come into contact with someone that inspires us to look at the world in a different way, with a sense of playful wonder and joy. Swiss percussionist Fritz Hauser is just one of these rare individuals that has followed his path producing work that has been described as 'innovative', 'captivating' and 'truly unique'.

He is an enigmatic virtuoso artist who possesses the ability to hold an audience's attention through carefully focused performance technique and compositional craft.

Born in 1953 in Basel, Switzerland, Fritz Hauser has developed his sound language in the most varied ways. With solo concerts, in different small and large groups, in multi-media projects (theatre/dance/film/radio/architecture), and with numerous recordings, he has contributed to the development of the drum set from a mere timekeeper to an instrument in its own right. His concert tours have taken him around the world and he has commissioned and performed works from various different composers. Among these are numerous works for drum set solo by John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, Rob Kloet, Bun Ching Lam, Joey Baron, Stephan Grieder, Pierre Favre, Mani Planzer, Robert Suter, Warren Smith, Franz Koglmann, Art Clay.

In the area of improvised music Fritz has collaborated with a whole list of musicians such as Urs Leimgruber, Joëlle Léandre, Marilyn Crispell, Christy Doran, Lauren Newton, Patrick Demenga, Pauline Oliveros and Michael Askill. His compositions for percussion ensembles and soloists, sound installations, radio plays, music for films and readings are regularly performed throughout the world.

Fritz Hauser has been welcomed back to Australia with a residency in 2012 at the Australian National University in Canberra as well as a special program with SPEAK Percussion, Melbourne.

Here is an interview that I recently conducted with Fritz prior to his visit to Australia:



Fritz, can you please tell me about your background and how you became a professional musician?

I have started off as a 12-year old, imagining to become a famous Rock drummer, being inspired by the music of the Beatles. The Rolling Stones came later into my world and then it was already too late to think of something else than noises, sounds, and rhythms.

I have finished High School in Basel/Switzerland but instead of studying the law (which would have been the other possibility) I decided to focus on music. I was already playing in a band for some years and we tried to become professional

musicians, to make our living with playing gigs and recording music. This went on for a while - in the meantime I also studied classical percussion for two years at the Conservatorium in Basel; however, the musical education as varied as today and being an orchestral percussionist was not my goal.

So I left the Conservatorium, eventually left the band too, and tried to become a percussionist who can exist on his own. Solo programs with self-written pieces were the next step, then I came in contact with theatre people, visual artists, dancers etc. and the many fields of the arts became my world.

Today I am a performing artist as well a composer. I collaborate with an architect, with theatre directors, choreographers, a light designer and I recently put together an exhibition with sound-installations in collaboration with Boa Baumann (space) and Brigitte Dubach (lights).

*Your selection of compositions and improvisations often utilize a singular instrument, such as a solo snare drum, singular gong, cymbals etc. Can you please tell me where your inspiration comes from for the exceptional works?*

Reduction has always been one of my artistic characteristics. I felt much more challenged to make one cymbal sound in many ways than making many cymbals just sound. One of my solo pieces with a strong theatrical element is *Drum with Man*, directed by Barbara Frey; this is a piece, which has caught audiences' attention around the world.

I have written a solo composition for Marimba and 3 cymbals, making use of the Marimba in a very sparse way, avoiding all the infamous cascades of notes. What came out is a kind of Zen-Buddhist approach to Marimba - so they say.

My latest solo-CD features a solo piece for 1 small gong: *schraffur for gong solo*. I am basically scratching a gong for 55 minutes, using all kinds of dampening and sounding techniques to make use of the various overtones.

*Are you influenced by Basel Drumming, (the basis of all rudimental snare drum technique), and have you had any connection with Fasnacht, (one of the worlds largest festivals that features brass and drums)?*

I have taken part in Fasnacht once when I was a 6-year old child, hated every bit of it and never went back. Of course, I have heard the music, am impressed with the drumming techniques and do not understand any of it, sorry!

*I am particularly interested in your large-scale work Schallmaschine - can you please tell us about this project.*

*Schallmaschine* is a collaborative project with architect Boa Baumann. We wanted to space the music in an architectural way. The first version of *Schallmaschine* (2002) was featuring 4 stages at shoulder-height at an art-space in Basel, with the audience wandering about the hall. The music was played by 3 percussionists per stage, using a time score that allowed sudden changes and subtle co-ordination without any signs or other directing. The second version was created for the Melbourne Arts Festival in 2006. There we went for a *Schallmaschine 'small'* approach, featuring 3 percussionists on miniature instruments created

by Rosemary Joy. We played with scores by David Young underneath Federation Square in odd surroundings, performing 42 times each for an audience of three at a time. This project was also in collaboration with Speak Percussion and percussionists Eugene Ughetti and John Arcaro. The 2007 version of *Schallmaschine* was again in Basel, using a 3-storey scaffolding, featuring 21 percussionists from different countries, including people like Steve Schick, Bob Becker, Emanuel Séjourné and Timothy Constable just to name a few.

*Another essential aspect of your performance practice is your collaboration with Architect Boa Baumann. Can you please tell us about this?*

Here is an excerpt from the first chapter of the recently published book *ARCHITECTURE MUSIC BOA BAUMANN FRITZ HAUSER*. It was published by Niggli Verlag in German and English

"Reciprocal Resonance

... The collaboration between the architect Boa Baumann and the musician Fritz Hauser, which has lasted over twenty years, is an inspiring example of the combination of these disciplines, which are interrelated far too seldom in this day and age. There is nothing compulsive about this collaboration: Baumann has architectural commissions in which Hauser is not involved and, in turn, there are works by Hauser in which Baumann does not participate. Yet also in the joint projects, the collaboration is not always evident at first glance. To no small extent, the pair are united by a propensity for reduction and for unpretentious naturalness. This book aims to provide insight into an unusual friendship between artists and to let their joint oeuvre vividly come to the fore in front of this backdrop.

In 1987, the percussionist Fritz Hauser travelled to Piedmont for the first time. *Castel Burio*, three kilometres south of Costigliole d'Asti, was his destination - an old castle, looming abruptly on a hill and purchased by a group of five young architects and art historians from Germany and Switzerland seven years before ... In the early eighties, Northern Italy was not yet seen as a chic travel destination, time seemed to have come to a standstill and properties were cheap. *Castel Burio* had stood empty for years and the new castle owners, with idealism, a lot of energy and little money, had set about making the old walls habitable and revitalising them. Networked with the art scene, a start was made with cultural events: exhibitions, performances, dance and music. The architect Boa Baumann from Bern, one of the castle owners, heard about Fritz Hauser from a friend, attended a concert of his in Zurich and invited him to Burio. Hauser's solo performance in the castle would have lasting consequences: it not only gave rise to the long-term friendship between Hauser and Baumann, but also indirectly led to Piedmont becoming the percussionist's adopted home. As Fritz Hauser puts it, he fell in love with the region immediately, and travelling there today is something of a homecoming, as in 1990 he purchased a half-derelict house himself, in the midst of the vineyards near *Castel Burio* ...

... Hauser and Baumann see their form of dialogue as an "exchange of inspiration without disciplinary

scissors in mind". Each conceptual approach is assessed for the qualities of its content; the technical, musical feasibility is then another step, which initially, during the research phase, is not to be acknowledged as an argument.

Upon being invited to Australia, Hauser and Baumann considered presenting *Schallmaschine* at the 2006 Melbourne Arts Festival. As the spatial situation in the event centre BMW Edge Theatre did not permit a relatively hierarchy-free and centre-less performance on the scale of the riding hall version, they developed the concept *schallmaschine small*: the three musicians John Arcaro, Eugene Ughetti and Fritz Hauser played several times a day at three carefully chosen, extremely different locations in the building complex, for eleven minutes at a time, to just three or four people, on the basis of scores by David Young, and with miniature percussion instruments made by artist and instrument maker Rosemary Joy. The very small groups of visitors were welcomed at the theatre entrance by ushers and guided through the theatre's underground labyrinth of technical installations beneath Federation Square to the respective performance location. The unusual environment, but also the direct, even personal, opposing relationship between the small audience and the respective musicians, gave this experimental arrangement its appeal. Finally, the visitors were released outdoors via the rear entrance of the building complex. In this manner, 126 miniature concerts took place in four days ...

*Is there any advice that you would like to pass on to young percussionists regarding their career in percussion? Specifically, areas of concentrated study that you recommend, etc.*

As a matter of fact I just recently published my ideas about focusing - studying with more effect - in a box with 33 postcards called FOCUS. The cards are the tools, the instructions are updated on my website. Everybody is invited to contribute. What I do recommend to young percussionists is absorbing as many inspirational aspects of any kind of art - native, old, classical, modern, computer, video, film, literature, painting, sculpture, light, theatre, opera, dance ... - as you can. Wearing the paradiddle-blinders is no help in understanding the world we live and work in.

**DRUMMING SPECTACULAR: March 3rd, 2012 Canberra Festival: a week of activities with young artists from the DRUMatiX Percussion Group (Gary France- Director), The Sydney Conservatorium Percussion Ensemble (Daryl Pratt director), as well as professional ensembles SYNERGY Percussion and Ensemble Pinguins from Norway.** <http://music.anu.edu.au/events/drumming-spectacular>

*A private living room in Kew with SPEAK Percussion, Melbourne: A new chamber opera performed in a living room and conceived by leading Swiss collaborators Fritz Hauser and Boa Baumann who are both renowned for their exploration of sound and space. Featuring soprano soloist Deborah Kayser, a trio of Speak percussionists, and a box.*

<http://www.speakpercussion.com/performances.php>