



'Sculpting' with sounds around us

By Robert Hicks

With their transparent plexiglass tutus and long-tailed tuxedo evening jackets, Benoit Maubrey's Audio Ballerinas & Electronic Guys can create electronic drones from their light sensors or capture the distant toll of a church bell with their digital memory devices.

"Essentially we're a group that works with sounds," says Maubrey, who founded Die Audio Gruppe in Berlin in 1985. "We always keep an open ear to sounds that are happening around us. We integrate those sounds into what we do live."

From July 10-13, Die Audio Gruppe will present its sound performance, Audio Ballerinas & Electronic Guys, featuring classically-trained dancers Elizabeth Brodin and Irina Kornejewa along with electronic sound men Maubrey and Gerrit Devries, at The Kitchen.

"I used to be a painter and I just got bored with spreading paint on canvas and just hanging them up on the wall. Sound as a three-dimensional sculpture travelling through space gives me a lot more freedom to work with rooms and spaces and to get that tingling effect of working directly in front of the public," says Maubrey.

Maubrey, who is American-born of French parents, studied English literature at Georgetown University before heading to Berlin in the late '70s to work as an artist. Inspired by Yves Klein's live-printed models and Duchamp's readymades, Maubrey began to pick up old clothes at flea markets and harden them into sculptures using paint. With the growing electronic music scene in Berlin, Maubrey saw the opportunity to transfer his ideas to sound. He designed Audio Jackets, made of second-hand clothes, equipped them with loudspeakers, amplifiers, batteries and minicassette players, to create mobile sound sculptures.

"I've built about ten electronic uniforms since 1982, starting with Audio Herd, which was a group walking around in outdoor parks. The suits were made of fake animal skin," says Maubrey.

Audio Herd premiered in 1985 at the Bundsgartenschau, an annual garden landscaping event which takes place in different German cities. Playing audio recordings of animals designed to correspond to different areas of the park, the participants performed choreographed dances, which generated sound textures.

A year later at the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, inspired by the biggest steel mill in Central Europe, the Voest Alpine, Maubrey created a second set of uniforms, the Audio Steelworkers. Borrowing ten fire-proof coveralls from the factory and equipping them with mounted amps and loudspeakers, Die Audio Gruppe gave outdoor performances throughout the city with prerecorded tapes of steel mill sounds.

That same year, Guitar Monkeys premiered at the Berlin Atonal Music Festival, which won Die Audio Gruppe over to the punk and avant-garde rock scene there. While touring with Guitar Monkeys in 1989, Maubrey met the director of the L' Aeronef in Lille, who asked him to design uniforms for an event that would take place on local beaches. From that meeting Audio Ballerinas was born and so began Maubrey's work with solar cells as a source for sound. Audio Ballerinas premiered at the Les Arts au Soleil Festival in 1989.

Maubrey had sought out other sound environments in 1987 during the festival Die Anweisung in Berlin. He took his audio uniforms to the subways of Berlin, recording the instructions of station attendants to passengers to create

The Villager Music



Benoit Maubrey's Audio Ballerinas

sound collages, which emerged from the Audio Subway Controllers' uniforms.

Die Audio Gruppe is very much about capturing the sound environment of the particular venue in which they perform, so each event differs widely from others. But to maintain some kind of structure to the pieces, which are never performed from a prepared score, Die Audio Gruppe works from a menu of 20 basic pieces, adapting their sounds to what they find wherever they perform.

Maubrey interviewed French cyclist Bernard Hinault, five-time winner of the Tour de France, for a word-collage for his 1988 event, entitled Audio Bicyclists, for the Festival des Arts Electroniques in Rennes. Last year, Maubrey introduced Electronic Guys during a tour of Brandenburg and Die Audio Gruppe's appearances last week during Lower Manhattan's Buskers Fare and their upcoming concerts at The Kitchen mark the U.S. debuts of Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys together.

"We always look for people who are open to sound and who can react very quickly to what goes on around them," says Maubrey. "It's all a very natural process."

Audio Ballerinas & Electronic Guys, at The Kitchen, 512 W. 19 St.; July 10-13, 8 P.M.; \$15. 255-5793.