



THE DOMINICAINS DE HAUTE-ALSACE

ARTISTIC INNOVATION PRAISED TO HIGHEST HEAVEN

The Dominicains de Haute-Alsace has entered the relatively tight circle of Cultural Encounter Centres (CCR). This coveted label, awarded by a committee from the Ministry of Culture, includes "places of remembrance, often far away from large cities, which are dedicated to research projects and interdisciplinary activity that form close links with various sections of the public". While some centres veer towards gardens, theatre arts, words or utopian architecture, the Dominicains has chosen to open itself up to all music associated with the digital arts, particularly music with strong cross-border overtones. This is the only CCR in Alsace.

The former monastery, a shrine to Rhineland humanism that still permeates the venerable buildings in the heart of the town of Guebwiller, has become a centre of artistic innovation inventing new forms of listening in order to attract audiences who would have remained impervious to traditional concerts. Built in the 14th century, at the time of the Holy Roman Empire, the Dominican monastery consisted of a church, a cloister and some convent buildings, and up until the French Revolution it housed the Friar Preachers of the Order created by St Dominic in 1215. The murals in the church, dating from the 14th, 16th and 18th century, depict Bible episodes or portray the great saints from the Rhine valley. It has one of the rare rood screens in the area. The Revolution sounded the death knell to the religious activity of the monastery whose buildings were declared national property and then sold privately. The nave of the church was used over time as a factory storeroom, stables, a military hospital in time of war and even a market hall.

The monastery buildings served as a hospice from 1830 to 1980.

In the 19th century, a concert hall was built at the mid-point of the church's choir. The site owner, Jean Jacques Boucart, a textile manufacturer, wanted "to ennoble the mind and heart with music, to restore the unity and brotherhood of our citizens, to bring a taste for music alive among us, and to perpetuate this most noble art in our regions by spreading it far and wide, so to speak, like a perfume". The first concert was given on December 22nd 1838. The Guebwiller Music Society, supported by corporate sponsorship, brought such prestigious performers as Clara Schumann who gave four concerts there from 1862. Artists' residences allowed such musicians as Sigismund Neukomm, a pupil of Joseph Haydn, to compose their works at the monastery.

"we try to make sure that our audiences undergo an original sensory experience"



> Nina Rajarani and Bharata Natyam on the rood screen, June 2014



> The Sound Garden © Bartosch



> Nina Rajarani and Bharata Natyam in the nave, June 2014

THE EXCEPTIONAL ACOUSTICS OF THE CHURCH AND NEW FORMS OF LISTENING

The nave of the church boasts excellent acoustics thanks to its 24-metre-high wooden ceiling and its architectural proportions that are cleverly designed for optimal voice projection. That is why the General Council of Upper Rhine, which acquired the Dominicains in 1991 and invested in the site's restoration, decided to dedicate it to all forms of music. An audiovisual centre, a laboratory for digital design, was set up in 2011. The Dominicains has several concert halls available, from 90 to 640-square-metres according to the way they are set out: concerts take place in the cloister, in the semi-open air, in the lower choir, the nave, the crypt and the summer refectory.

"Starting from an appealing musical offering and artists who really want to join us, we try to make sure that our audiences undergo an original sensory experience", says Olivier de La Blanchardière, Assistant Director in charge of developing the Dominicains, citing by way of illustration a concert that features a Latin Mass by the 15th century composer, Johannes Ockeghem. It was programmed for 11pm, and the listeners, lying on mattresses, also became spectators in a play of light that sprinkled the nave area with a roaming choir. "The concert was a sell-out. More than 300 people. If we had put on a classical concert, at 8pm, we would at best have collected the medieval enthusiasts, the lovers of that vocal repertoire", says Olivier de La Blanchardière who delights at a 95% take-up at concerts and a hard core of 400 subscribers, even though the public trend is moving more and more to last-minute booking. In addition, from autumn 2014, the Dominicains will

have innovative computer software from their Customer Relationship Management base which, like large digital publishers, will tell their customers, "If you liked that concert at the Guebwiller Dominicains, you'll love this one..."

CREATING NEW WORLDS WITH 3D MAPPING

Philippe Dolfus, director of the Dominicains since 2005, and Olivier de La Blanchardière, who came from Nice in 2003, both of whom make up the deliberately tiny artistic committee, invented the concept of "Klassic Lounge", a crossover performance which mixes several styles of music: for example, a lyrical singer, a transvestite from the Geneva underground scene, a light tenor and a flute ensemble from the Andes, all of whose talents are mixed by a director. "People come to us to be surprised. You can like both Tino Rossi and Mahler, Mozart and jazz." Very often the concert coexists with 3-D mapping, a concept adapted by Philippe Dolfus at the Dominicains where the classification "historical monument" prevents any modification to the walls, not the least any hammering in of nails. Video projection allows these requirements to be bypassed. For a few magical fleeting moments the building recaptures its links with the fresco art of old.

It was Architecture 1024, a group of Strasbourg architects who opened an office in Paris, who conducted the first experiments in video-mapping in the cloister of the Dominicains. They got involved in the Nuits Hypnotiques, a cosmic journey linking classical, electronic and world music with three-dimensional digital images. The town of Guebwiller used the idea to create Noël Bleu during the

>The Dominicains' nave, Iddo Bar-Shai, Classic Music and Digital Window © Bartosch
> Chemirani Ensemble and Prabhu Edouard, Iranian music and video-mapping in the cloister, June 2014



"Creating video-mapping requires a lot of technical expertise, but above all it's a serious artistic activity."

month of December. Mapping involves photographing a building to make a mask of it. Using software, the contents of live or recorded music are integrated onto the mask. "The mapping trials proved convincing and we invited resident artists to create new worlds and original styles", says Olivier de La Blanchardière. Some musicians create the soundtrack, while others, video makers or specialists in film animation, produce the video scene, supervised by a designer.

THE EXPERTISE OF THE DOMINICAINS EXPORTED TO LUXEMBOURG, GERMANY...

The concerts which the audiences take part in, lying on mattresses, loungers, or wandering around, allow them to discover the place with new eyes. In June 2014, for the encounter between the Iranian ensemble, Chemirani, and the Franco-Indian virtuoso tabla player, Prabhu Edouard, the Audiovisual Centre's digital production transported the audience to Persia. For eastern jazz, the mapping will take its inspiration from Islam's decorative arts. A video-mapping with a 20-minute soundtrack will require three weeks' work from the artists in residence. Precision videos, hugging the contours of windows down to the last centimetre and matching the openings and edges of the walls, even take the colour of the walls into account. The work will not be the same for a projection at the Dominicains as it would be for one at Neumünster Abbey in Luxembourg, which itself is also classified as a Cultural Encounter Centre. In 2013, the Audiovisual Centre created video-mapping there which told the story of the dialogue between mon-

othoist cultures while musicians improvised live over the images. In April 2014, the Audiovisual Centre put on a performance at the Freiburg Konzerthaus in Germany.

"Creating video-mapping requires a lot of technical expertise, but above all it's a serious artistic activity. The mapping is designed for a particular place. It only makes sense there. But now we have a grammar and vocabulary of video effects. We're looking forward, with some enthusiastic cultural partners, to working on exporting our mapping and presenting productions elsewhere. We're also interested in partnerships with business leaders who have an artistic sense, especially when they have magnificent open spaces like NSC Schlumberger in Guebwiller", says Olivier de La Blanchardière.

CONSTANTLY INNOVATING TO STAY ALIVE

The Dominicains, therefore, has already invested in some wasteland belonging to a developer, for a show with the Colmar Choir School led by Arlette Steyer. The concert took place in a 4,500-square-metre "hall of columns". The video-mapping, which established bridges between the hall of columns and the Cordoba Mosque or the bamboo forests of Japan, was projected onto a neo-Tudor style façade, since the hall's ceiling was too low.

A decade ago, the Dominicains launched the Dominicains Business Circle to offer their members communication opportunities in this prestigious site, as well as the chance to exercise their social responsibility or to provide sponsor-



> Dominicains Audiovisual Centre production on open land, Gast, Isenheim, June 2013

ship. This, along with help from local groups, allows the Dominicains to host audiences made up of disadvantaged people who themselves would never go to a concert on their own initiative, as well as audiences of young people. "We can sensitise parents to music through their children.

But to interest young people and surprise them we need to innovate and bring new life to them. We're on the same wavelength as the business leaders. If we don't keep innovating, in 20 years we'll no longer exist", says Olivier de La Blanchardière.

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> Nina Rajarani and Bharata Natyam, South Indian sacred dance in the nave, June 2014



> Chemirani Ensemble and Prabhu Edouard, Iranian music and video-mapping in the cloister, June 2014



> Chemirani Ensemble and Prabhu Edouard, Iranian music and video-mapping in the cloister, June 2014



Budget: 1,600,000€ per year
Employees: 11 full-time employees
Activities: about 50 events per year
Status: Association, headed by Brigitte Klinkert, Vice President of the General Council of Upper Rhine



> Dominicains Audiovisual Centre production in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Neumünster Abbey (CCR), September 2013 © Paul Theisen