

Cross Platform Sound in other media

In the same museum where Adolf Hitler denounced avant garde art, Allora & Calzadilla recontextualise the dictator's favourite piece of music with strategies borrowed from John Cage and Gordon Matta-Clark. By Marinus de Ruiter

Andrea Giehl performing "Ode To Joy"



Clamor (2006)

"As we are living in a state of armed globalisation, it seems that war has become the de facto means to achieve political and even non-political ends," declare Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla. "Focusing on ways through which people justify and thus engage in such violent strains of human behaviour, in other words, what makes people love and die, hate and kill for a cause, seems to us to be a very important field of investigation. Music has no small role to play towards this end."

In their recent multiform artworks, the Puerto Rican based artists have explored the relationship between music, war and power. The great hall in Munich's Haus der Kunst – where Adolf Hitler notoriously denounced modern forms of expression as 'entartete kunst', or degenerate art – is thus the perfect site for their new performance piece. Called *Stop, Repair, Prepare*, it is based on Franz Liszt's piano version of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, which, as one of Hitler's favourite artworks, was frequently performed at Haus der Kunst during the Nazi period.

Allora & Calzadilla, who recently moved to Berlin for a four year residency, have always worked in a variety of media, including installation, performance film and sculpture. *Stop, Repair, Prepare* foregrounds music: it concentrates on the *Ninth's* fourth movement, notably its "Ode To Joy" section. Since June, Munich pianist Andrea Giehl has been playing variations on the Liszt version two to five times a week on a modified Bechstein. A round hole has been sawn through the centre, removing the middle part of the strings, and the pedals have been inverted, forcing Giehl to play the instrument from inside the hole. In addition, the piano is on wheels, allowing her to move around the room during certain sections.

In its deliberately hobbled form, the piano references various works, most obviously John Cage's prepared piano pieces from the 1940s. The removal of strings causes parts of the still unmistakably Beethoven music to sound percussive.

The cut-out piano itself nods towards Fluxus, several of whose members have modified pianos in a radical way. The de-cored Bechstein also brings to mind the *anarchitecture* of conceptual artist Gordon Matta-Clark, who bored perfectly shaped holes through the walls of rundown buildings.

With *Stop, Repair, Prepare*, Allora & Calzadilla subvert the idea of "Ode To Joy" as a symbol of power, a political tool and, in their own words, "an icon of humanist platitudes". "I think it's because of what it seeks to portray, which is brotherhood and being in common, that it has been claimed by so many different people, to completely different ends and uses," comments Calzadilla, before its Munich premiere. "Our idea is to critically unhinge it one more time and try to recontextualise it yet again in another time and space," adds Allora.

Since the premiere of the *Ninth* in 1824, three years before Beethoven died, "Ode To Joy" has been claimed by a great diversity of ideologies, as musicologist Esteban Buch describes in his book *Beethoven's Ninth: A Political History*. Aside from the Nazis, "Ode To Joy" was used as an anthem by Ian Smith, the white supremacist dictator of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. It was loved by Abimael Guzman, leader of the Peruvian rebel movement Shining Path. In 1985 it was chosen as the official European anthem, and in 1989 Leonard Bernstein conducted a performance of the *Ninth* to celebrate the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The same year, the *Ninth* was blasted through loudspeakers by Chinese students during the Tiananmen Square protests – which was ironic, since, years before, Mao had favoured it as the music of the Cultural Revolution.

Allora & Calzadilla were initially fascinated by the most peculiar section of "Ode To Joy" – its so called Turkish march. Like many of his contemporaries, Beethoven was drawn to instruments that originated in the Turkish military and spread throughout Europe in 1800s, as a result of the wars between the Ottoman Empire and European monarchs. Allora & Calzadilla's interest in the Turkish march chimed with

their recent series of artworks, which explore the role of music in militarism.

"When you look at history you will find that a lot of musical instruments were actually developed as signalling devices, as effective ways to communicate orders to soldiers, from drums to horns, flutes and trumpets", says Allora. "Music became part of the battlefield, with specially designed horse drawn carriages to accommodate the drums or horns of the musical regiment. Even today, MP3 players are plugged into the sound system of armoured tanks, with playlists of popular music from Eminem, Tupac Shakur and Metallica to Death Metal and Country music, selected by soldiers as background music during combat."

Their recent 'war music works' combine sound and music with sculptural elements and performance. *Clamor*, for instance, is a bunker-like structure from which a brass band attacks the audience with penetrating versions of politically charged hits like "Born In The USA" and "Sunday Bloody Sunday". For their light and sound installation *Wake Up*, trumpeters were invited to record a new version of the military wake up call, "Reveille". US improviser Paul Smoker recorded a free jazz deconstruction, while Mazen Kerbaj created a sonic assault reflecting the violence in his hometown Beirut. Other participants included Birgit Ulher, Franz Hautzinger, Ingrid Jensen and Natsuki Tamura.

Although their work is informed by politics and historical developments, Allora & Calzadilla, who have been collaborating since 1995, refuse to call themselves political artists. "It's a way of simplifying, because we always have gravitated towards interesting historical and social information in our projects," says Allora. "That doesn't mean that we underscore any less the experiential component of it, the actual inventive component of what actually does happen in this case on the musical side. I give equal importance to the whole beast." □ *Stop, Repair, Prepare is at Munich's Haus der Kunst until 14 September. www.hausderkunst.de*

MARTINO SOLOMONOV (GIEHL); A BURGER (CLAMOR)