



Glatt & Verkehrt Festival

Music and wine are, for many of us, the ideal combination. **Ton Maas** gallantly takes on the tough challenge of discovering the charms of Austria's winery and Danube-located contemporary music festival

The medieval town of Krems an der Donau in Austria is home to a festival with an unusual name: Glatt & Verkehrt. It's the German equivalent of the knitting term 'plain and purl,' describing the two varying types of stitches of a knitted garment, one smooth and the other rough. It also reflects the mission statement of the festival's founder and artistic director, Jo Aichinger: "to present traditions interwoven with contemporary music." The actual programming is done without any self-imposed limitations. So don't be surprised if you see a classical pianist like Paul Gulda get on stage with a *taraf* (small folk group) of Roma musicians to demonstrate how composers like Haydn and Liszt worked Gypsy motifs into their compositions, or if experimental musicians from Indonesia offer a glimpse of the alternative music scene in their homeland. But Glatt & Verkehrt isn't just

about oddities and fringe phenomena. They'll also present certified party animals like Fanfaraï and current world music stars like Malian songstress Fatoumata Diawara. Glatt & Verkehrt evolved from a three-day event in 1997 into a festival that now lasts over a month and includes both large and small scale concerts in various venues, workshops and a musical trip down the Danube on an antique, steam-powered riverboat. The idea to make the river Danube an integral part of the festival first came to Aichinger in 1995 when the town of Krems celebrated its 1,000-year anniversary. "The theme chosen for that celebration was *Am Fluss der Zeit* (On the River of Time)," says Aichinger. "So I submitted a plan for a festival based on the idea that the accordion, which according to a popular myth was invented in Vienna, travelled by boat up the Danube to Germany, where it was further developed by Heinrich

Band to become the Band Union (*bandoneón*) and eventually the modern accordion." It was clear from the start for Aichinger that a festival – especially one that takes its content from all corners of the world – has to be firmly rooted in its own home soil. In the case of Glatt & Verkehrt, that's wine country. The grand finale of each edition – a series of five nights of concerts – therefore takes place in the vast courtyard of Winzer Krems, a co-operative winery famous for its Grüner Veltliner, a delicious white wine. The enclosed area is converted into a full-sized concert hall with a thousand seats for the occasion. Smaller concerts are organised in the yards of individual winegrowers, following on the ancient tradition of *heurigen*, that date back to the time when empress Maria Theresa allowed winegrowers to sell their produce tax free in their own yard directly after harvest, provided uncooked food was also served.

Contrary to common festival practice where artists are flown in on the day of their concert and out the next, musicians are invited to spend several days before and after their own performance "to get a feel for what we're trying to do and to become involved in a more profound way," Aichinger explains. "All expenses covered by the festival organisation, of course," he adds with a smile. Glatt & Verkehrt also includes an artist-in-residence programme, allowing a musician to stay in Krems for a longer period in order to prepare one or more performances especially for the occasion. When American trumpet player Frank London was artist-in-residence in 2012, he composed a work for trio (his own), a brass band (a local *trachtenkapelle*, performing in traditional dress) and four trombones

dramatic acoustics of the natural site with its rocky and watery surfaces. There's no such thing as a 50-minute festival slot at Glatt & Verkehrt. Each of the five nights in the festival series in Winzer Krems consists of three full-length shows of an hour-and-a-half each, with a one-hour interval during which food and drink is available in the yard. The efficiency of the catering staff is impressive – serving meals to a thousand people involves surprisingly little queuing and waiting. Over the course of 18 years, Glatt & Verkehrt has built a solid reputation for quality and, as a result, gained a loyal following. The rise in the average age of the

audience runs parallel to that of the festival and its programmer. But contrary to some other festival directors, Aichinger is not obsessed with rejuvenating his public. "It's a matter of respecting the people that do show up year after year," he says. At the same time he's not

playing up to them. Some of the themes Aichinger chooses – each of the five nights in Winzer Krems has an overall theme that loosely envelops the three shows – are meant to prickle and challenge. One of last year's themes – Music in Times of War, Protest and Resistance – featured not only the protest songs of English singer-songwriter Billy Bragg, but also the traditional chant of Cambodian master musician Kong Nay, (pictured above) one of the few artists who survived the Khmer Rouge era, followed by an orchestral performance of *13½ Märsche um den Sieg zu Verfehlen* (13½ Marches to Miss Victory), variations on a theme by Mauricio Kagel. From rock through to deep ethnic sounds and contemporary avant-garde on a single night is quite a stretch, even for a festival that doesn't file itself under 'world music.' But then Glatt & Verkehrt isn't your average festival. Whereas most festival programmes tend to be rather predictable if you know who's touring or who made an impression at WOMEX last year, with Glatt & Verkehrt you can be sure you'll be introduced to some interesting or even great artists you hadn't seen yet or never even heard of before. ♦

+ DATES This year's edition runs from July 3-26
+ ONLINE www.glattundverkehrt.at