



# I STILL DO NOT KNOW IF I AM AN ARTIST

**ABOUT THE COMPOSER *FRANK HOLGER ROTHKAMM*, UNCONVENTIONAL  
OPUS COUNTING AND ELECTRONIC MUSIC**

**by Klaus Hübner**



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**501** works with a total playing time of 55 hours, 59 minutes and one second (as of May 20, 2013): *Frank Holger Rothkamm's* sound empire is wide ranging. He has developed it from word and staged-reality since his time as an actor at the Palace Theatre in the Lower Rhine city of Moers. Similar to *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, who was advised by his father Leopold to count and number his works, Rothkamm created a directory of all his works patterned after Mozart's "directory of all my works", but designed for MP3 technology and the resulting need for quantification. Rothkamm started this in 2002 after he had a vision to enact a radical change to his past as an artist. He cut his hair, went bald and started to compose intuitive music based on psychedelics. From this time forward he "counted" his works. Opus 1 is the synthesizer piece "Earth Frequency Oscillator" which was re-released on the CD "FB01" and recorded by the composer's own IFORMM system. The opus numbers are identical with the continuing index numbers of a database where Rothkamm's work is captured. As more music from Rothkamm's past resurfaces so does the ever-increasing catalog of works. So far, Rothkamm's preserved musical tracks go back all the way to the year 1982. Frank Holger Rothkamm defies conventions with his (musical) biography: he began as an actor, as someone who utilizes foreign texts and characters and subordinates his own ego to each particular role. Without a doubt, this is a creative accomplishment based on the authorship of others ("*als Basis fremde Federn benutzende Leistung*"). From an early age Rothkamm's scattered biography exhibits cracks, splits and restlessness with uncomfortable and sometimes life-threatening side effects that increasingly determined his musical creativity. Against this background, embedded in computerized and electronic music, as well as performative actions, his work is a way to forge a synthesis of sound art and popular musical forms and styles. Rothkamm's electronic works are in contact with the works of the serial music of *Karlheinz Stockhausen*, *Her-*

*bert Eimert* or *Franco Evangelisti* from the 1950s - electronic sound sequences struggling between tradition and experiment. How to develop an extended concept of music, like *Beuys'* expanded concept of art, Rothkamm demonstrates in ALT: microtonal, drone-like ambient flitters, wrapped in embossed linear frequency patterns.



Photo by Nina M. Schneider

### MOERS - BERLIN - AMERICA

Frank Holger Rothkamm was born in 1965 in Gütersloh, the hometown of *Hans Werner Henze*. There he received his first piano lessons and became interested in drawing. He created his first compositions at the age of twelve while living with his family in Nürtingen in the state of Baden-Württemberg. To comprehend music was a passion for the young Frank Holger Rothkamm. "Music frees us from academic exercises and conventions. Music must be encountered with the same curiosity and quest for surprises like the manifestations of nature," wrote Hans Werner Henze in the preface to the book "The Liberation of Music" (1994, edited by *Franz Xaver Ohnesorg*). This curiosity and quest for surprise were revealed to Rothkamm upon hearing a string quartet by *Paul Hindemith* on the radio, and led to a new understanding of music. He constructed his own graphical notation for a composition for two pianos which he submitted to the competition "Youth Composes". His work was rejected because the jury did not consider it music, thereby demonstrating the exact opposite of Henze's postulate. Rothkamm made sonic tracks first on cassette: the

FISCH series had many sequels and commenced with a performance on the island of Crete. In 1980 he continued his training in piano and violin at the music school in Moers. Through his music teacher *Karl Heinz Witte*, he established contacts with the avant-garde Palace Theatre. For the production of "Reproduction Prohibited" Rothkamm developed a piano piece on a few quotes from *Anton Bruckner's* 7th symphony. Another move took him to Cologne in 1985, where he worked as a civil servant at the university's hospital. He delved extensively into algorithms for computer music and on this basis published the album "Music After Sculptures" (1986), which marked his debut as a recording artist and his leave from the acoustic piano. The Sömmering studio in Cologne was founded in 1984 by *Ingo Graebner* and *Andrea Buchwald* as an independent artist-run venue with unconventional opportunities for performance- and site-specific artists. This was the ideal place for the composer and conceptual artist Rothkamm. There, in 1985, he staged the music performance Tien, a "powerful" deconstruction happening with synthesizer sounds and violin passages: In a darkened room he smashed white stone slabs with a black hammer while two monitors flashed light -- graphic patterns comment on reduced and monotonous sound material. In Berlin, Rothkamm studied communication sciences, bionics and philosophy and then went to Vancouver for personal reasons (he "followed the better sex"). There he worked for conceptual artists and a computer game company. But Vancouver was just a stopover on the way to the U.S. where he immigrated in 1990. First, he lived in San Francisco, where he released his first 12" vinyl record "Magick Sounds Of The Underground", as well as the CD "Death Rave 2000". "I'm not sure why I went to America. I also do not understand why I've moved around the US almost every year until 2008 when I bought a house in Los Angeles and founded the Lodge For Utopian Science", says Rothkamm. In 1994 in New York he fell ill with depression,

suffered panic attacks, anxiety disorder and depersonalization which lasted until last year. In the 10 years of commuter-living between New York and Los Angeles, Rothkamm supplemented the establishment of the Flux Records label (and the composition of 93 piano pieces on his

digital synthesizers, user manuals, vinyl records and various printed materials fills whole rooms. In Europe, says Rothkamm, the separation between theory and practice - between sound engineer and composer - pre-



beloved Kurzweil K2000 synthesizer) with commercial commissions for video-games and soundtracks for film trailers. In addition, he produced remixes for artists such as *Elliott Sharp*, *Alfred 23 Harth* and *Wolfgang Muthspiel*; developed music concepts for *Rodney Graham*, *Harald Fuchs* and *DJ GLOVE*; and remixed audio by the *Cranberries*, *Zeena Parkins* and *Rebekka Bakken*. True to his motto that art and advertising are not mutually exclusive, he produced commercials for Levi Strauss, Sears and Philips. He also created soundtracks for experiments in 3-D projection technology, like *Star Wars* by *George Lucas*.

## MEDIUM FOR OTHER BEINGS

A *Steinkamp* house in Los Angeles - built in 1935 and renovated in 2010 by Rothkamm - serves the artist as a research center for "psycho-stochastic sciences". A collection of early

vented him from establishing a multi-functional sound art because he did not separate "high" art and pop culture or the art of *Joseph Beuys* and advertising. True to the *Shakespearean* motto "All the world's a stage", Rothkamm puts to good use the acting craft he learned at the Palace Theater in Moers: "I still engage this same extended concept of the theater that the "Living Theatre" also pursued. Now that my illness subsided I am again working with the stylistic means of the performance." What he learned in Moers now serves him well: The Artist as Medium. Here Rothkamm sets new standards that have more to do with *Plato's* philosophy of memory -- the anamnesis -- than with the production of new material from the pen of a composer. "I open myself as a medium for other beings." A vehicle for this kind of meditative creativity was discovered by Rothkamm in the Gabler grand piano built in New York in 1922. *Ernst*

*Gabler*, a German immigrant, who built high quality pianos until 1931, constructed a grand piano with a warm, deep and intimate sound reminiscent of the "Golden Age." Rothkamm discovered - remembering his own piano training - in *Carl Czerny* etudes and the School of *Velocity* the point of departure to exploit the idea of an artist as a medium. With "Tetralogy" he returned to the classical acoustic piano, following the Platonic philosophy of memory, "Whether to apply the term art or artist to my contribution to American or German culture, I do not know. However, what remains - in the sense of the extended concept of art from *Beuys* - are the products of artistic activity, although these may not be understood ("wahrgenommen") by future generations." Well aware that the role of the artist in America amounts to little, Rothkamm finds there an atmosphere that nourishes his musical ideas, even if reality turns into disaster. This happened in 2007, when the "K2000" and his historic studio equipment became victims of the devastating forest fires in California.

Unless otherwise noted, the quotes are from an interview with Frank Holger Rothkamm on April 12, 2013.



Frank Rothkamm:  
**K5**  
Flux Records  
FLX16



Frank Rothkamm:  
**ALT**  
BASKARU  
karu: 15



Frank Rothkamm:  
**FB01**  
Flux Records  
FLX4