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This book is the product of countless encounters with Free Music Production spanning a period of more than thirty years. I was a fan from the start—and even today my relationship to FMP is still shaped by those early experiences. I have no training in musicology, so this publication does not constitute a scholarly examination of what is now more than fifty years of FMP history. Instead, it reflects a subjective, well-informed, and musically critical vantage point on that history based on intensive listening and many conversations with the main protagonists. I had to limit the ground covered, though, because the FMP cosmos is simply too complex. For example, I mention the only true super group of free improvisation, *Last Exit*, with Peter Brötzmann, Bill Laswell, Ronald Shannon Jackson and Sonny Sharrock, who set off terrific fireworks from 1986 to circa 1993, just once, here, in this sentence.

I have repeatedly presented and interviewed the artists represented on the label, as well as reviewing their releases in various media; I have written liner notes for FMP CDs, published a text in a leaflet marking FMP's 25th anniversary in 1994, and written for Peter Brötzmann on a number of occasions.<sup>1</sup> I am therefore an involved and also a biased observer.

*Machine Gun* (FMP 0090) was probably the first FMP recording I ever listened to, although I'm no longer sure. The first FMP LP I wrote about was *Transition* (FMP 1170) from 1988, with Heinz Becker, Louis Sclavis, and John Lindberg. Reviews followed of *Open Secrets* (FMP 1190) and the *Duos Europe/Amerika/Japan* (FMP 1260/70/80) by Peter Kowald, along with *Zwei Quintette* (FMP 1210/20) by Rüdiger Carl. If you listen to them all one after the other, these five releases alone form their own cosmos of marvelous and diverse music.

I remember quite vividly how I felt when my friend Georg Kelling from Hattingen called me and said he had received the CD box *Cecil Taylor in Berlin '88* in the mail. Unlike me, he was a subscriber, so he had the privilege of holding this obscure object of desire in his hands in the fall of 1989. The pre-announcement of the release already caused a sensation: 11 CDs plus a discography of all musicians involved and an accompanying 118-page book. Unheard of, unimaginable, unbelievable! No one in the music world had ever realized a project like that. I made the pilgrimage to my friend's house that same evening, and we sat down and began to listen. To this day, I still listen to this music over and over again. All the superlatives that have been thrown at it still hold true for me.

Until 2001, I occupied myself intensively with FMP music and wrote frequently about it. But after that, my work for Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta11* made it impossible for me to simultaneously remain active in music journalism. It was not until 2009 that I attempted to end this caesura in my career by planning a book about FMP.

But it was another six years or so before Okwui Enwezor had heard enough about my book ideas that never took concrete form and asked me to put together an FMP exhibition at "his" institution, the Haus der Kunst in Munich. When shortly afterwards the Akademie der Künste, Berlin (Academy of Arts) agreed to show the exhibition on Hanseatenweg, the very setting where the *Workshop Freie Musik* had regularly taken place since 1969, the circle closed for me. Today, another six years and a few anecdotes about institutional obstruction later, you are now holding my publication in your hands.

Those two exhibitions in Munich and Berlin are documented in this book, which echoes their structure, revolving around the major FMP event series, the *Workshop Freie Musik* and the *Total Music Meeting*, as well as covering six of the nine FMP *Special Editions*, a general account of record and CD production, and also including the various forays into literature, the visual arts, and dance. As in the exhibitions, there is a particular focus on the relationship of FMP to Cecil Taylor, on the jazz scene in the GDR, and on the role of women in FMP. This book is founded on the firm conviction that the FMP label, the milieu, the open family was the most important cultural and cultural-policy contribution made by West Berlin to the twentieth century.

In my opinion, it was only the so-called Cold War and the city's insularity, against the backdrop of the overall social awakening taking place there, that made possible the support for a self-determined musicians' initiative like FMP from 1968 onwards, sanctioned both in terms of budget and cultural policy. Or, to tell the story in anecdotal form: 1968 was the year that Peter Brötzmann's invitation to the *Berliner Jazztage* was retracted again because he could not guarantee that his band would observe the dress code stipulated in the contract, an incident that led to the first *Total Music Meeting*. In 1970, Alexander von Schlippenbach's *Globe Unity Orchestra* (with many important representatives of FMP and European free jazz) then performed at the *Jazztage* without wearing business suits; in 1993, Peter Brötzmann's *Die Like A Dog Quartet* and the Charles Gayle Trio (at the cost of six transatlantic flights) played for two days at the Charlottenburg Town Hall, with free

admission. Shortly thereafter, the 25-year history of this FMP series of *Free Concerts* came to an end. And the cultural policy landscape changed for good.

My viewpoint is a West German viewpoint. By now I know that, like many of those who studied art history in West Germany, I innocently read *Painting in the 20th Century*—“the indispensable reference work for anyone interested in the art of our century,” according to a quote from *Die Zeit* on the book’s cover—without any inkling that the author was a Nazi who tortured Italian resistance fighters to death. And just today (September 30, 2021) I once again came across what Richard Wright<sup>2</sup> replied to a reporter who asked him after his arrival in Paris in 1946 if the “black problem” in America might soon be solved: “There is not a black problem in the United States, but a white problem.” So with regard to my own viewpoint, which has (hopefully) also changed over the decades, I have to take into account all the “simultaneous non-simultaneities” and the self-evident privileges that I carry around with me.

And knowing that FMP and some of its protagonists have acted in quite a macho manner, it may seem strange that I am including here a subchapter on FMP and women. While working on the exhibitions and looking at hundreds of contact sheets, however, it was obvious that a relatively large number of women performed in the FMP context, not least the *Feminist Improvising Group* with Maggie Nicols, Irène Schweizer, Corinne Liensol, Lindsay Cooper, Sally Potter, Annemarie Roelofs as well as Georgina Born at the *Total Music Meeting* in 1979. And yes, that performance sparked considerable controversy, but it also met with great enthusiasm on the part of the audience. Those I interviewed didn’t remember it that way, but the response can be heard loud and clear in the recordings uncovered by Jost Gebers in 2011 at my request.

The hurdles faced by record producers in the late 60s were extremely high. From today’s perspective, we have to remember that in those days it was an incredible financial and organizational feat to bring out a record, involving numerous trades ranging from performance to recording, and from mixing to pressing, printing etc. Not to mention distribution and sales of the resulting record. The sheer scale of this undertaking must be kept in mind if we are to appreciate FMP’s achievements.

In 1991, I had the first of my countless conversations with Jost Gebers, which was published in *Jazzthetik* and is republished here (in a revised version). Excerpts from more recent

conversations starting in 2011 appear throughout the book. My numerous interviews, travels, and encounters with Paul Lovens, Peter Kowald, Peter Brötzmann, Werner Lüdi, Butch Morris, Radu Malfatti, Dagmar Gebers, Erhart Hirt, Alexander von Schlippenbach, Evan Parker, Johannes Bauer, and many others have left a mark both on myself and this book. Some of the interviews printed here reach from the past all the way to the present, and thus in some cases describe situations that are very different today. For example, Germany is now reunited. This was unimaginable to me when I reviewed *Transition* back in 1988, featuring the trumpeter Heinz Becker, who had crossed over in 1983 after shortly before making the fantastic record *Pan – vielleicht Tau* (FMP 1010) as a GDR citizen. Even more dramatic is the fact that other protagonists, such as the youngest of the FMP partners, Peter Kowald, whose *Ort* taught me more about music from May 1994 to May 1995 than at any other time in my life, and Hans Reichel, whose music made many a sunset and so many nights so much more beautiful for me, left this world far too young.

It is interesting to note that FMP and its protagonists have been experiencing an incredible resurgence of attention worldwide over the past few years. Peter Brötzmann has played a key role, evidently touring the world non-stop before COVID-19. Five of the *Special Editions* have been lavishly re-released on vinyl (prompted by the exhibition in Munich). Jost Gebers is constantly fielding requests from all over the world for possible additional re-releases. Perhaps this book can help us to better understand why FMP “can be seen as a model, a model for action ...”<sup>3</sup> If it leads to more and more people discovering FMP for themselves, then it has all been worthwhile.

- 1 I was responsible, for example, for the laudatory speech at the presentation of the Albert Mangelsdorff Prize in 2011, a text for Wels, and the *Unlimited 25* curated by Peter Brötzmann in 2011, and also an essay in his book *Brötzmann, Along The Way 2021*.
- 2 Adam Shatz: “Outcasts and Desperados,” *London Review of Books*, vol. 47, no. 19, London, 2021, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n19/adam-shatz/outcasts-and-desperados>.
- 3 Nele Hertling in conversation with the author, October 4, 2011.

