Interview Arovane

Arovane aka Uwe Zahn bought his first MPC (MPC 2000 XL) as early as 2002. Various other models, such as the MPC5000, 3000 and 4000 followed. Currently, his setup includes the MPC Renaissance and MPC Studio.

1. 'Ve Palor', your follow-up to 'Lilies", recently appeared on the n5MD label. Has your production style changed since the last album?

A lot of time has passed between 'Lilies' and 'Ve Palor'. Music production technology as well as my own style of production have evolved in the meantime. While I was composing 'Lilies', sampling was in the forefront, working with a hardware sequencer – Yamaha QY700, combined with field recordings and an analogue mixing console – Tascam 2600. Some tracks were recorded on a DAT recorder or on the Fostex D80 – an 8-track hard disk recorder. 'Ve Palor' includes tracks that I produced for DIN in 2003 as well as new recordings.
Having access to several parameters at once is essential for my style of production and the realization of my musical ideas. That's why I prefer hardware controls, knobs, pots, switches. The look and feel, the direct access to every parameter during production makes an ideal work flow possible.
In 2003 I added a Kyma Capybara system to my studio. I controlled this DSP monster with motorized faders of a fader box. An ideal combination of soft- and hardware.
Manufacturers and developers of musical instruments have recognized and implemented this aspect of spontaneous access. Hardware controllers such as the MPC Renaissance and Studio, as well as Push, enable me to have direct access and edit parallel processes during composition.
In this respect my production style has shifted somewhat towards software. Live9 replaces the hard disk recorder and is controlled by Push. Beat programming is done by the MPC controllers and the Yamaha sequencer is set to Live's Midiclock and controls all hardware synthesizer and samplers. The perfect integration of hard- and software.

2. What gear are you currently using?

That's a great bridge to your next question. Aside from numerous hardware sound generators such as the Waldorf Q and Microwave XT, Clavia Nord Rack2, Nord Modular G2, Kawai K5000s, Access Virus Indigo2 and TI2, EMU E4XT Ultra, EMU e5000, EMU Vintage pro, Korg Wavestation, and outboard

equipment such as the TC Fireworx, Alesis Wedge, an audio patchbay, a Tascam DA 20 MKII DAT Recorder, I also use the Yamaha QY700 sequencer.
On the software side, Ableton Live9 is running on an iMac 2.4 Ghz Intel Core 2 Duo and a Macbook Pro 2.4 Ghz Intel Core i7. As VSTs, I use Native Instrument's Absynth5, Reaktor5, Massive, U-HE's Zebra2, MFN2, Madrona Labs Aalto and effect plugins from INA GRM, M4L, Little Endian's SpectrumWorx, Sugar Bytes, Tornado and Effectrix and AudioSpillage's Drum Spillage. The instrument hybrids MPC Renaissance and Studio supply the beats. I use Push as a controller for Live9, also an Akai Max49 keyboard. Audio is converted by a Komplete Audio 6 audio interface from Native Instruments that is connected to the Tascam mixing console. The studio monitors are MonkeyBananas. Yes, that's their actual name!

3. What's your take on the technological development of MPCs towards a hybrid approach (computer-supported system)?

I like it! The hybrid concept allows for greater flexibility in future software development. There's huge potential in the MPC OS. I was quite skeptical at first when it comes to the integration of soft- and hardware because I was so used to working with the hardware version of the MPC. However, the new MPC generation has convinced me completely. The transition from my 'old' MPC to the new concept was seamless. I can sample, cut and assign beats or sounds to the pads immediately and play and edit them. I believe this development is headed in the right direction. I can easily imagine an enhancement of the software with modular functionality. 2-3 LFOs with a frequency extending into the audio range, an additional envelope curve, an inclusion of internal and external effects / VSTs, etc. and the control of all parameters with a modulation matrix. The slots of the matrix are on the Q-link controls. A touch of the capacitive Qs and the link is set up. A turn of the dial changes the modulation output. An elegant and intelligent enhancement of the MPC concept.

4. How do you utilize the MPC Renaissance in your studio?

The Renaissance is the beat master in my studio. FM patches of the Nord Modular G2 provide percussive material for sampling, slicing and arranging. Sampling sounds, realizing ideas, programming beats is done in a flash. I use the filters and modulation capabilities excessively, tie in VSTs, open the MPC in Live9 and begin my production. Resampling and rearranging beats / bass or melody structures, it all works without a hitch.

… and how do you use it live?

I use the 'Studio' version of the MPC for live performances. Flat, very light,

easy to transport together with a mobile computer. The setup is quick and I'm able to start my live set within minutes. In combination with the ability to configure custom MIDI mappings with the 1.5 OS MIDI mode, the MPC is basically the Swiss army knife of controllers.

5. How do you chose your instruments?

I'm very picky when it comes to instruments. The mechanical quality of components is very important to me. Knobs and pots should be screwed onto the body and must work smoothly. The body must be robust, Audio / USB inputs and outputs have to be of a good mechanical quality, displays should be crisp with lots of contrast. Of course, the feel of the hardware and the look of the software play a large role, too. Are the controls thought through, is the the interface laid out in a logical and consistent manner? What's the sound like? If a system supports my creativity, I'll buy it.

6. Your tracks are defined by a very detailed sound design. Are there any MPC-specific tricks that you would like to share?

There's a lot of creative potential in the MPC. An interesting trick is the adaption of a Modular G2 patch. In this patch, the clock speed of a sequencer is driven into the audio range. A small sequence turns into a wave form. I use a short sample on the MPC, record a sequence with the lowest BPM number and turn the system up to the highest BPM. Together with additional filter modulation, LFOs and the offset of the sample starting point, sounds emerge that are comparable with granular synthesis! Completely controllable using the Q-links. And I haven't even touched the integrated effects of the MPC or VSTs yet.

7. How do you create new tracks? Are there certain patterns that you developed over time?

I turn on the studio, improvise with a few synthesizer sounds, record these with the sequencer and build my tracks up that way. I could be inspired, for example, by samples or field recordings. Sometimes I go out to record sounds of nature, transfer them to the computer and adjust them with various synthesizer methods. Sometimes I have specific sound ideas that I wish to implement or certain beat structures. I don't follow any specific patterns, although there's a certain sound with recognition value.

8. What kind of sources do you use for your samples?

I use all kinds of audio sources for my samples. I recorded 1.3 Gigabyte of sound material in my abandoned garden during summertime. Old rusty machines, big metal vats, heaps of metal, just fantastic audio material. I feed

these sounds to Native Instrument's Absynth and use the granular oscillators to create bizarre soundscapes, sample these in the MPC or the EMU and then edit this material further. The Clavia Modular G2 is also a wonderful sound source. Its modular synthesis capabilities offer unlimited audio material. Samples also come from various software platforms and VSTs. Little Endian's SpectrumWorx offers a variety of sound creation. I also find the new Spectrum Efx in M4L very interesting. The TC Fireworx provides enormous sound manipulation possibilities for samples with its flexible effect chains. I can use these tools to shape basic sounds in different ways and let myself be inspired by the results.

9. A look into the future: How are we going to make music in 15 years?

I believe we will continue using hardware to make music. The revival of modular synthesizers is a great example. People just love being able to touch and feel things. At the same time, I'm very open to the development of new interfaces. There are going to be touch capacitive displays, providing the musician with a tactile feedback, systems that communicate closely with the user, such as Google Glass for example.
I saw a musician in 1980, Michel Waizfish, who used so-called DataGloves to control a battery of FM synthesizers. Movement and the shaping of sound merged into a fascinating event. It was a live concept ahead of its time.
The studio is becoming more mobile, more modular and more accessible with controllers that the user can interact with. Apple's iPad is a good example for how computer technology can vitalize the instrument market and provide the musician with new ways to create and produce music.

10. What does your future hold? What can we expect from Arovane in the near future?

A new album is in production right now and several collaborations are forming. Various live concerts including a visual realization are planned for all over the world in 2014. Next to my musical activity I am also expanding my range with sound design. Sounds always were the motor of my creativity. It's a seamless transition from music production to sound design.
There are contacts to various synthesizer manufacturers and software companies that I would like to expand upon to create presets or sound packs for new products. Zero-G is releasing a sample pack with Arovane Signature Sounds.

Thank you for the interview (SH)