

Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world. An Interview with Michael Reinboth

Compost Records is a Munich-based label which specializes in soulful and funky. Throughout a distinguished career they have released music which has touched on numerous styles and genres. From the vocal house of **Robert Owens**, the smooth techno of **Roland Appel** to the jazzy lick of **Rainer Trüby Trio**, and more, the only thing which unites every *Compost* release is the fantastic music to be found on each disc. By **JOHN BITTLES**



Such has been the quality of their output that those in the know have been only too eager to shower it with praise. Quite early in their career much missed music mag *Jockey Slut* declared that *Compost* shows that German electronic music has a lot more to offer than just harsh four-to-the-floor'. While **Giles Peterson** himself once proclaimed 'With great pleasure I pronounce *Compost* the most consistent and forward thinking record label of continental Europe'.

This year sees label founder **Michael Reinboth** and everyone else at *Compost* celebrate reaching the grand old age of 20 by releasing *Soul Love: 20 Years Compost Records*. This is a gorgeously designed book highlighting all that has been great and good about electronic music over the previous two decades. In it luminaries such as **Laurent Garnier, Sven Väth, Richard Dorfmeister, Robag Wruhme, Giles Peterson, Danny Krivit** and more contribute words of wisdom, memories and anecdotes in a book which illustrates that *Compost* is as much a family as it is a business. Featuring text in both English and German, over 450 photographs from the history of the label and a download code for a 40 track compilation, the book really comes across as both a work of art and a labour of love. Seriously, the dedication and passion for music which has come to define the label oozes out from every page.

In the following interview with label founder **Michael Reinboth** we discuss turning twenty, the new book, its accompanying compilation, the formation of *Compost Records*, working with **Carl Craig**, the future, and lots more. Also, keep an eye out for your chance to win a copy of *Soul Love: 20 Years Compost Records* at the end of the interview.

[By way of introduction, can you tell us a bit about who you are and what you do?](#)

I am the founder, A&R and CEO of *Compost Records* and of some of our subsidiary labels, too. Beside that I'm a DJ, author, journalist, father of two kids, football fan (of course **Bayern Munich**) and record (vinyl) collector. Sometimes I also do music consulting jobs for movies or doing lectures about music topics, music and social media, or how to run an independent label.

[How would you describe Compost Records to someone who has never heard of you before?](#)

Well, the *Compost* sound covers the full spectrum and variety of electronic music with a distinctive musical approach and feel. We don't release tools, we release tracks which ooze hints of soul, jazz, funk, electro or disco without being retro.

[This summer Compost has been celebrating 20 years in the music business and reaching its 500th release by publishing a bumper book called *Soul/Love: 20 Years Compost Records*. What can readers/Compost fans expect?](#)

The hard facts are: 296 pages, more than 450 photos, a long interview about music biz and clublife, promo changes in 20 years. We have a short label and a **Michael Reinboth** profile in there, while all texts are bilingual in English and German. We have 27 anecdotes and a download code to 40 tracks (13 brand new ones, 13 of my faves and 14 hidden *Compost* gems, which are great b-sides, secret weapons or undiscovered pearls).

The soft facts: we asked circa 60 artists, DJs and companios, remixers and friends six questions and we got 138 firm statements from the likes of: **Laurent Garnier, Sven Väth, Gilles Peterson, Kruder & Dorfmeister, Solomun, Fat Freddy's Drop, Ezel, Danny Krivitt, Gerd Janson, Robag Wruhme** and lots of others. So these questionnaires and statements together with the photos are the major content of the book.

The book also contains a few covers, flyers, logos, memorabilia items, and *Compost's* artist and remixers A-Z.

[The book contains contributions from some real musical legends. Can you tell us a bit about some of them?](#)

These were the six question we've asked:

1. What does music mean to you?
2. How does passion in electronic music evolve?
3. When does music deeply move and touch you?
4. What is the main ambition of searching for the perfect 'tune' today?
5. Why do you do what you do, what are you searching for?
6. What do you associate with the sound/music of *Compost Records*?

So we picked up the best answers from 60 artists and we parcelled this in six chapters/sections in the book.

[What made you decide to create the book?](#)

Last year we thought about what to do with our jubilee, but a Best Of compilation or famous remixers remixing their fave *Compost* tunes, or *Compost* acts making an anniversary new track were so obvious. Finally in November 2014 my friend, colleague and *Compost* artist **Michael Ruetten** and his girlfriend **Nina Schellhase** proposed the idea of the book and they already came along with a concept and a graphic designer. We were involuntary amused and convinced.

[The book is like a work of art in itself. Who was the main creative force behind its design?](#)

Andreas Gnass did the whole design. He is owner of a concept and design office called *U9 visuelle Allianz*, in

Offenbach (near Frankfurt) and he is a true and deep fan of letters, typography and music. He got a professorship in typography in Darmstadt und Bozen (Austria) and nowadays his agency *U9* is also an advertising- and event agency.

[It must have been quite emotional revisiting the label's 20 year history. What was it like trawling through the archives?](#)

Oh, it was such an outstanding procedure. It was often peals of laughter, it was a Sisyphean task and hell of work, because a lot of photos, covers, flyers, types of logos were made in the analogue days of the early Nineties. A nightmare was to get and make the photo-credit lines, to get all the right names under the 450 photos. And it was a pleasure and fun to search for the hidden gems.

[The book also comes with a download code for a massive 40 track compilation. Can you tell us a bit about this?](#)

So 13 tracks are nearly brand new or unreleased, like **Siren A/Way** or **Compost Allstars featuring Robert Owens Good Day** which we also release on 12" vinyl with remixes. **Compost Allstars** are **Beanfield, myself, and Christian Prommer and Roland Appel**; both are **Fauna Flash**, and part of **Trueby Trio** and **Voom:Voom** and **Prommer & Barck**.

Beside and during the idea and implementation of the book we thought about the hook. Well, it was a spontaneous idea to create the **Compost Allstars**. We flew in **Robert Owens**, who has two albums on *Compost*, and during the recording sessions we thought we can do more like that in a flexible *Compost* producer line up and team...so there will be more **Compost Allstar** music coming next year. The *Good Day* single with a stunning **Show-B** remix (he is also part of the *Compost* family) coming end of October on 12".

The other chapters are 13 of my *Compost* faves and 14 hidden *Compost* gems, which are great b-sides, secret weapons or undiscovered pearls.

[The compilation is split into three parts: Unreleased, your faves and Hidden Gems. How hard was it to limit your section to just 13 tracks?](#)

Oh yes it was hard and not fair. In fact: these 13 tracks are few of my faves, but it was a difficult decision. Sometimes my faves from the *Compost* vaults differ or change, depending on mood, times, Zeitgeist and whether they, or me feel clubby or not...

[Your selection includes probably one of my favourite ever Compost tracks, the Carl Craig remix of Tides by Beanfield. How did Carl Craig get involved with this project?](#)

We've known each other for ages. He invited us to Detroit years ago. Anyway, I sent him an email with the original track and a request of a **C2** remix and unbelievably in a very few hours same day he replied: 'the tune is awesome, there is nothing to consider, I must do a remix of this'.

[What made you decide to set up your own label in 1993?](#)

I've been into music since 1980, not only as a DJ and music journalist, throughout the 80s I ran a magazine called *Elaste*, DJed three nights a week, organized several parties and events, and in 1990 I started my own frequent Friday night clubnight called *Into Somethin'* where we played a variety of fresh music: house, disco, trip hop, drum & bass, acid jazz, rare groove, funk, soul. *Into Somethin'* was the bassinet for *Compost*. In England *Mo Wax*, *Talking Loud* and *Ninja Tune* had just launched, and I thought, 'hey I must start something similar in Germany'. There was no open minded label like that in Germany, but I was playing all that freestyle shit. So since 1991 /92 I was going pregnant with the idea of a freestyle electronica clubmusic label, since **Rainer Trueby** came to play at my clubnight and brought a demo of his Freiburg colleague **Bernd Kunz**, who

is the brain behind **A Forest Mighty Black**. That was the beginning...

Me, **Rainer Trueby**, and **Jan Krause (Beanfield)** produced **AFMB** in Munich and during that week of **AFMB** production in 1993 we brainstormed a few more ideas, projects and **Beanfield** and the compilation series *Future Sounds Of Jazz* and *Gluecklich* were born.

At the time, did you envisage that it would still be going more than 20 years later?

Not really... in the early years I had a foresight of a very few months, end of the Nineties maybe we were and had plans looking ahead for another year. After our 15 years anniversary I was thinking, oh my god we can reach 20 years.

What three Compost tunes should be in every DJ's bag?

1. **Beanfield Tides Carl Craig** Remix.
2. The brand new / latest release
3. A late night, early morning *Compost* classic

And what three Compost releases would you recommend for home listening?

Various *Future Sounds Of Jazz Vol. 2*

Felix Laband *Dark Days Exit* album

Alif Tree *French Cuisine* album

How has the music business changed since you first set up the label?

Dramatically. You can read a lot about this topic in the book, but to sum up and make it short: first of all it changed from analogue to digital on all formats, soft- and hardwares, demos, music production, graphics and communication. Also distribution and promotion changed drastically while the social areas of a recordstore, a lonely club changed into internet mailorders, Boiler Rooms and anonymous facebookers in soundclouds. Everything changed really. I am not the type of person who [is] saying or lamenting: yesterday it was always the better days. I like digital sticks, I like digital full-stop, I hate CDs but like WAVs, MP3s and vinyl, I like email and newspaper on paper, I hate Facebook and all those time-consuming pseudo social media.

So I am deeply a reverberator of what *Compost* reprazents: take the best things from the past and keep them alive in modern times and in the future, avoid being retro. Also the reception of music and styles/genres changed a lot, but if you're following your heart and soul with an open mind way of life and with a sense of Zeitgeist, you don't think much of what has changed and you don't regret anything or you don't miss the standards of back in the days.

What is the best part of running your own record label?

To be on tour with my boys. Clublife...definitely. Sometimes the giddy with pleasure [feeling of] hearing an amazing new track by our artists, producers or remixers. A new track can not only make my day, it can stimulate a week or more....

Also discussion about music, trends, styles, taste, reviews or other labels. Music can be funny. So groovy guys in the office and as artists is something like gold.

And learning leaning learning...

And the worst?

Well, label biz is 80 percent administration work, it's easy to do when a track made my day, but sometimes it can be pain in the ass...
Or when money is tight...

What does the future hold for yourself and Compost?

Oh we have good stuff in the pipeline, so I'm as enthusiastic as ever. As long as I am healthy, I'll keep on....
By the way of a huge back catalogue to nurse and service, we're just planning a new chapter of *Future Sounds Of Jazz Vol. 13*, new *Party Keller Vol. 4*. *Foresight 2016* looks great and challenging....any further future view might be hubristic or pretentious. Without being cocky, but I feel young, gifted, foolish, music-hungry, and still unsuccessful. Our efforts are neither finished nor terminated, lot of plans and things to do, on a journey, but I guess we'll also slow down the frequency of releases a bit and we'll try to release better stuff...

Do you have any final words for our readers?
Stay tuned.

We have two copies of this excellent book to give away to two lucky readers. For a chance to win simply answer the following question:



Where is Compost based?

1. Berlin.
2. London.
3. Munich.
4. Me nan's garden shed.

Send your answer to quiz@titel-kulturmagazin.net where two lucky winners will receive a copy of *Soul Love: 20 Years Compost Records*.

All entries must have *Compost* as their subject line, and the body of the text should include your full name and address. The competition closes at midnight on Saturday the 24th October. The decision of the judges is final, and no cash alternative is available. Good luck!

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)