

Fadi Dorninger
Ridin' a train

A musical ride on the night train through the Voest Steel Works







History

Die Achse des Ofens ("The Axis of the Oven"), the St. Peter project, was a theatrical undertaking by Peter Androsch, Uwe Dörr and Stefan Kurowski presented in 1995 as part of the Festival of the Regions. Since the piece was set in what was previously the outlying areas of the village of St. Peter — today, the plant grounds of VA-Stahl (VOEST) — the theater group wanted to take its public on a tour of the site of these dramatic and historic events. This was done by means of a panorama train consisting of four observation cars built from old railroad equipment specially for this occasion by VA-Stahl. The subject of the piece: the resettlement of the inhabitants of St. Peter and the destruction of their entire village in a matter of only a few months by Hitler's Germany in order to make room for the Hermann Göring Steel Works.

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Those involved with Die Achse des Ofens, expressed the desire to organize this musical tour through the VOEST plant grounds with a panorama train as a traveling concert hall. This was also featured at Ars Electronica 1996 with the performance "Ridin' A train" by Aural Screenshots featuring James Plotkin as part of the musical program Sub'tronic. The environment of the giant VOEST steel works by night — the company's system of tracks is more extensive than that of Vorarlberg, Austria's smallest province — impressively illuminates the way from simple mechanical processes to complex mechan-o-tronics, from the relay switches to complex automation, and human beings in the field of tension and interplay between labor and technology.

This event is being continued due to the past success of "Ridin' a train", so that this year's presentation will be the third confrontation of industrial ambiance, work and music. Following up on Death Praxis (Ikue Mori and Tenko) in 1997, Pan Sonic from Finland will be this year's musical conductors and engineers. Whereas Aural Screenshots provided a melancholy evocation of the industrial romanticism of days gone by, Death Praxis placed human beings in the focal point. This year, Pan Sonic will navigate through micro-terrains of technology using home-made analog electronics.

Thanks to VA-Stahl, its transportation system workers, Pita

Photos: Ars Electronica Documentation 1996 (ORF/Camera: Wolfgang Lehner)