



Thomas Förster

Where technology becomes art

Thomas Förster in a conversation with Peter Csobádi

The fact that Förster Audiotechnik causes a stir also on the international musical scene is confirmed by an interview done by Prof. Peter Csobádi – previously Herbert von Karajans right hand man – with Thomas Förster for the Kulturhandbuch Salzburg 2013. The editor of the Kulturhandbuch, Johann Hammerer in addition to interviews of Prof. Peter Csobádi with the three directors of the Salzburger Festspiele Alexander Pereira, Peter Alward (Osterfestspiele) and Cecilia Bartoli (Pfungstfestspiele) recommends his readers the interview with Thomas Förster with the following words: “Revolutionary news of the technique of sound reproduction [are to be reported from] the audio-pro Thomas Förster. Under the heading ‘Where technology becomes art’ Förster reports on the result of many years of research activity. His sound reproduction components transform the living room to a concert hall.”

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With the kind authorization of Johann Hammerer, editor of the Kulturhandbuch 2013, in the following you will find the interview done by Prof. Peter Csobádi with Thomas Förster for the Kulturhandbuch Salzburg 2013:

PC: One could read extensively about Thomas Förster and his audio technology in several renowned

professional journals. The new loudspeakers constructed by him "have caused a furore" (HIFI-STARs). You have received a high award from the Bavarian State Government for the innovative development you devised and implemented. Just the titles of these reports alone speak for themselves. The Emotional Dimension of Hearing" in one trade journal, the "Sense and Sensuality of Hearing" in the other. Under the auditory impression of your loudspeakers, one thinks of the path of music from the creative mind of the composer to the receptive mind of

the listener. The composer hears the music internally, which he then puts on paper. Then the musicians play the music back from the paper; that is already the second transformation of the first auditory vision.

TF: Life is generally a compromise; one can do the best possible. The extreme dynamic leaps can be reproduced with digital technology; it only requires careful work. Digital technology also acquired a bad reputation with the introduction of the CD, because many analog sources sounded better to the ear. Naturally, it was also due to the fact that the digital converters were actually not fully developed when the CD was introduced. We are working on these digital amplifiers and all the detail things; one has to consequently optimize the digital technology. Then all of that can be done, and it is often superior to the analog technology. However, it takes a lot of effort and it has to be done somewhat more carefully and more precisely than how it usually was and will be done.

PC: According to my non-professional formulation, that is a marriage between technology and aesthetics, between art and technology. This marriage is an embrace between technology and beauty, since technology is already art.

TF: Yes, that is the basis one must master 100 percent. And then the art actually begins. To be able to play with the elements, to deploy them, like the way a good violin maker manufactures something very special out of a piece of wood.

PC: How are the social and economic aspects of your industry, invention, and your activity? Where will these high-quality loudspeakers be implemented? Where will one be able to hear these?

TF: I began at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Munich about ten years ago; very sophisticated professors and recording engineers were there, who realized already during the recor-

ding - already with Deutsche Grammophon - that they need feedback about what they are recording. The professors at the Munich University of Music and Performing Arts were very grateful about that, since they recognized that if they place a soprano only a few centimeters closer or farther away from the microphone, these recordings will not be recreated in the recording studio. The result is that the things will be molded more plastically and honestly.

PC: Let's compare the sound recordings of the industry with those of a film recording. A lot of makeup and lighting tricks are applied, as is clothing. Is this also possible in the acoustic realm?

TF: That goes out over the loudspeakers then. We are the last link in the chain, so electronics are very important there. To provide the appropriate pulse outputs, so that the most extreme things also reach the ears undistorted, is the most important thing.

PC: The amplitude from the pianissimo of a flute to the fortissimo tutti is much larger than one can technically reproduce. Or does one only have to create the impression?

TF: It is naturally possible. My concern is that I can only stand at the very end of the line; there where what was done in the end by the artist with the sound engineer, to reproduce exactly that; above all, to reproduce the original signal unadulterated.

PC: That is the difference to film. A beautiful piano tone does not have to be embellished. On the contrary, it has to be reproduced as it was.

TF: That is precisely my desire. One can generate discolorations with such speakers and such chains.

PC: I only wanted to underscore the aesthetic and

ethical importance and conservation of the music through the respectively highly qualified technical facilities. I see therein the meaning of your work and your inventions. Can you not expand your activities into the recording realm? The reproduction sphere is there, but if the recording is wrong, then one cannot help.

TF: Yes, I think that the cobbler should stick with his lasts, and that there are people who invest the same love and care into making the recording as I do when attending to the reproduction of this recording. These people exist, as do the great sound studios in Germany, in the USA and elsewhere. But the greater ones are needed to take care of the very great artists of the world. The willingness is there to work together with those who can precisely do it well.

PC: If I may share a memory? In the 1960s, I was an employee of Radio Free Berlin. After the terrible devastation of the Second World War, the studio was rebuilt in a hypermodern fashion. There was even a radio museum with all the old microphones, and so on. One day, I was sent on a business trip to the BBC in London in order to observe the music recordings there. And what did I see in the studios? Which microphones were being used there? The same ones we already had in our museum. And in spite of that, the BBC was and is one of the best broadcasting corporations in the world.

TF: Today there are recordings made before the 1960s; they are outstandingly recorded. You will not find many recordings made with the most modern technology that have the same sound. The real masters were doing the recording back then. If one had left them with today's modern equipment, it would impossible to imagine.



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PC: The English record company EMI ("His Master's Voice"), under the unforgettable artistic directorship of Walter Legge, carried out symphonic recordings with Herbert von Karajan with the technical possibilities at that time, and these recordings are incomparably beautiful to this day. That is why I say it is the case of love between technology and art with you, whereby art can hardly live without technology anymore. Your technology becomes art.

TF: Yes, exactly. My goal is to authentically pass this art on to the next generations. Also for people who cannot experience such unique musical events. That is a piece of art history which should and must be shared.