



Anna Ceeh in Conversation with Zavoloka

AC: Your Kvitnu label has received a lot of acclaim, not just in the Ukraine, where you work, but also internationally. In April you received three awards at the Quartz Electronic Music Awards in Paris. Congratulations!

Z: Thank you! It was wonderful and unexpected to receive three awards at Quartz, including Quartz Label for Kvitnu. Dmytro Fedorenko aka Kotra founded Kvitnu in 2006 with the aim of releasing high-blood-pressure music. The first release in the same year was the Kotra & Zavoloka *Wag the Swing* CD album, which was our collaboration, and I also designed the CD cover. And then, one by one, we released Dunaewsky69 (Ukraine), Zavoloka (Ukraine), Kotra (Ukraine), V4w.enko (Ukraine), then Sturqen (Portugal) and Plaster (Italy). It's also interesting to realize that little by little Kvitnu is developing its own face, distinctive and unusual—that is most important!

AC: How did you become a music producer? What led you to start making your own sounds?

Z: I started to listen to experimental electronic music—early Warp records, Ninja Tune. I had several friends who also listened to this kind of music, and we could exchange information and CDs. So it was self-education—in Ukraine we didn't have any school to learn it in. There were just very conservative academic music schools. Only in my childhood I sang in a folk children's choir—and I can say that it was very inspirational.

AC: One can imagine that, at first, you were in a communication and technological vacuum?

Z: For this kind of music, yes. I had several friends who made more dance stuff, like deep house and techno, trance. We met together at Inertia studio in Kiev, Ukraine. There was no scene actually, just a few activists. When I met Kotra, I was surprised that somebody else was making experimental electronic music. Actually it was before Kotra had the Kvitnu label. We just became friends and played at a few parties together. It was a vacuum, and now it is not far from that time. It changes little by little, but for such a big country, like Ukraine, it is almost nothing. We still don't have proper web-zines or regular magazines, or even regular parties for this kind of music. Kotra had organized *Detali Zvuku* and *Kvitnu Fest*—experimental music festivals—but they were never supported by the state or even Ukrainian sponsors.

AC: What were your first moves in the area of electronic music, and who supported them?

Z: The first steps were strange. I had a very old, slow computer that made natural glitches, and I tried to work on it! Also I remember my friend DJ Architektor from Nenza Crew DJs, who made trip-hop, IDM, experimental music, acid-jazz, and jungle parties in Kiev. He played my first few tracks, and it was very noisy and rhythmical at the same time with stroboscopic lights. It was funny!

AC: How long did it take for your first album to be produced?

Z: Not very long. My first album, *Suspensia*, recorded in 2002–3, of course, was more like a compilation of different tracks, made in different periods. Some tracks were with recorded live percussion, and I mixed them in one meditative album. And only with my second album, *Plavyna*, did I already have a strong concept—it was recorded with a live Ukrainian wooden flute, called sopilka. So it mixed Carpathian folk melodies and bird sounds, played on sopilka with digital experimental



2005, as honorable mention in the digital music category.

AC: How did your equipment come together?

Z: I started to play live, and for me it was not interesting to dj my CDs, so I was thinking, what can I use for my live improvisations? I bought my first sampler and was very happy about it.

AC: How do you define the difference between making an album and a live performance? Can you think of a particular performance that stood out for you?

Z: Yes, it is absolutely different energies. When I play live, I cannot polish my sound; it is live improvisation. It is a live organism, with whom I have to negotiate. In the studio I feel comfortable and look at sound from each side; it is meditation.

About an interesting concert, I think it is the *Madeiradig Festival* on the island of Madeira. Such a weird, beautiful place!

AC: You are a music producer and musician. How would you like to be referred to?

Z: I would say maybe producer is more like a stylist for music, and a musician can play and generate art. Sometimes a producer can direct a musician, but in general I think it doesn't matter what you call it—producer or musician—strong personality is the main key. Maybe I feel more like a musician still.

AC: Which one of your albums is the most important for you and why?

Z: The very last one, *Vedana*, which is released now on Kvitnu. It is the second in a series of albums dedicated to the purification by four elements, in this case: water. Important because it was written over very long time, and I put so much energy and feeling into it. I wanted to make it strong and soulful, powerful and gentle in one time. This album is like immersion for me: Vedana flows, melts, drips, crashes. Vedana knows. Dive.

AC: A lot of your releases are collaborations with other sound producers. Can one conclude from this that you like working with colleagues?

Z: Yes, I've had very many collaborative projects—with Kotra, Antye Greie aka AGF, Mark Clifford, and other artists—and cross-genre projects. It is like exchange and the possibility to do what you would never do yourself; it's new blood to your brain. With Kotra the collaboration was on a few releases—like *Live Reports*, with our live improvisation—and the *Zavoloka versus Kotra* small EP, in which I deconstructed Kotra's sounds. But the most experimental collaborative work was where Kotra played live on a bass guitar and I played on an empty vinyl player with blank CD matrixes. The very first collaboration was with AGF, a German e-poetess and vocalist. We invented "Techno Like Trees"—the concept was to make miniature one-minute compositions, handmade bio beats. It was played live on two samplers, loaded with our own sounds and vocal snippets with a vintage metronome, like a battle. It was also released as a CD, *Nature Never Produces the Same Beat Twice*. Then I made the *Split01* CD with Mark Clifford from the English quartet Seefeel, in which we explored traditional instruments in a digital context—guitar and flute. But in some way the most interesting collaborations for me were with visual artists, maybe because we don't have to explain, just feel each other.



AC: What do you think of the visualization of your sounds? Who did you work with in the visual arts context?

Z: In live performances I frequently play with Laetitia Morais, a visual artist from Portugal. She is a real genius; I really like her artistic statement. Every time Laetitia invents new principles for her visualizations, and they really fit with my music. Laetitia and I think the same way, and I respect her very much! Also she made two beautiful videos to my tracks: the last one, *Vedana*, is included on the CD. I also collaborated with Swedish artist Anders Dahl on the *Swizhe* project, hosted by the Swedish Institute, and on the cross-genre art project *Move*, with dancers, visual artists, lighting designers, and musicians—it was physical theater, stage, and site-specific performances, workshops, and installations. We had tours in Ukraine, Sweden, Norway, Russia.

AC: You create a very complex, often overwhelmingly dense and powerful sound. Why do you think there are so few women within the area of experimental electronica? What do you think of these stereotypes?

Z: I think it is not only about experimental music—not so many girls in every aspect of human activities. Maybe because boys don't want to take us seriously!? But to be honest, I think it is just because women rely on inner feelings that they never want to show. Like Taoists, women quietly reach enlightenment while their husbands are engaged in martial arts. And in general, I think it is a question of inner energy.

AC: The technological aspects of sound production play an important role for you. Do you prefer digital or analog technology?

Z: I like both digital and analog, and also natural sounds. I like when you can experiment with different sources of sounds. Cool to have various textures and materials.

AC: “Sonic turn” has become a pretty lurid term in the media and cultural studies lately, and sound as a medium and as material gets a greater dominance. Do you think, or are you experiencing that sound actually plays a more important role?

Z: Actually I would say that all kinds of arts are mixed now. But it is a natural process. Music is just very abstract. Music and sounds were always part of life and always will be!

AC: Is Zavoloka a Russian or Ukrainian word? In Russian it means something soothing? And in Ukrainian?

Z: Zavoloka in Ukrainian has several meanings, like “fog” and “wanderer”!