

Ursula Bogner – Pluto has a moon

It seems almost incredible that Ursula Bogner's musical and artistic talents should have remained undiscovered until now. Yet in view of her biography, this might have been just as inevitable.

It was on a flight to Vilnius that I met Sebastian Bogner, Ursula's son, who told me he was on a business trip for a pharmaceutical company. The usual small talk soon led to the topic of his mother Ursula, who also 'liked to play around with synthesizers', albeit purely on an amateur level and in a dedicated music room fitted especially for this purpose in the parental home. Among her acquaintances, it was simply considered one of her many eccentric hobbies and not paid a great deal of interest. At a cursory glance, Ursula Bogner's life seemed simple and bourgeois to the core: a pharmacist, wife and mother, firmly ensconced in a detached house. A setup that made her obsession with electronic music all the more bizarre, an obsession that drove her to build her own studio for extensive recording and experimentation.

According to the usual chronological benchmarks, Ursula Bogner's biography appears short and conventional: Born (*1946) and raised in Dortmund, she moved to Berlin at 19 to study pharmacy. Degree in hand, she immediately went to work for pharmaceutical giant Schering, followed by marriage, children and a successful yet by no means sensational scientific career within the multinational heavyweight. At the same time, she developed a keen interest in electronic music.

Throughout her early twenties, she followed the activities of Cologne-based 'Studio für elektronische Musik', attended seminars by Studio founder Herbert Eimert, exhibited great enthusiasm for Musique Concrète and, later on, shared her children's enthusiasm for British New Wave Pop.

Nevertheless, Ursula Bogner never involved herself in any scene, never made her music public. Maybe this can be attributed to her boundless curiosity. Besides composition, she also tried her hand at painting, printing and developed a strong fascination for Wilhelm Reich's 'orgonomy', the sexual researcher and psychoanalyst's bizarre late work on his discovery of 'orgonenergy'. Reich aimed to focus resp. collect this particular type of solar energy and use it for healing purposes. To this end, he created an apparatus, a cabin of wood and metal otherwise known as an 'orgon accumulator'. Inspired by several trips to 'Orgonon' (Maine, USA) – Wilhelm Reich's former workspace and home - Ursula Bogner decided to construct her own accumulator and stored it in the family's backyard.

At this point, it becomes increasingly hard to shake the suspicion, later confirmed by Sebastian Bogner, that his mother was drawn to all things esoteric. Mounds of New Age literature and fringe science works would litter the Bogner household. And yet, throughout all this, she remained a Schering employee and thus firmly rooted in the sciences. Her compositions, too, betray few signs of esotericism, in fact they are closer to studies and sketches: humorous and - in view of her biography - almost silly rather than tied to any particular school of mysticism or science. Nevertheless, it is remarkably hard to grasp or classify her work as a whole. Over the course of 20 years, she dabbled in many different styles leading to a huge wealth of work and a bewildering variety of titles.

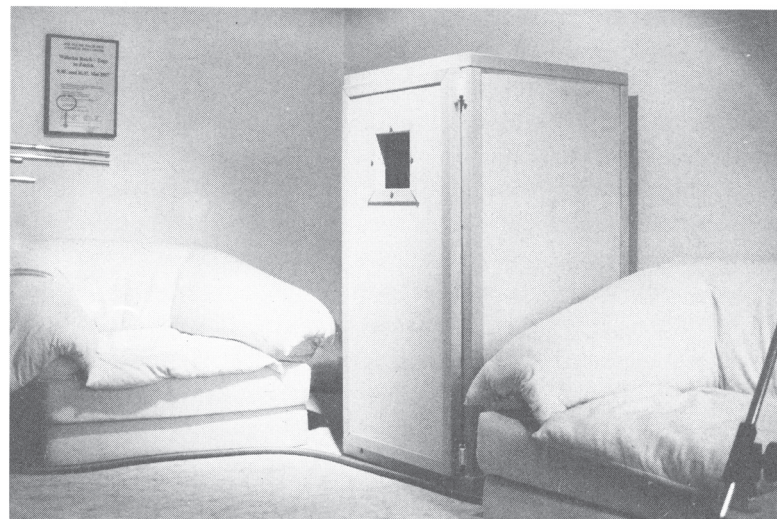
In the late 1960s, Ursula Bogner started to record and to draw partition-sketches. With some of these titles, we only found individual tracks of pieces recorded on a four-track-recorder – in these cases, I had to recombine the separate tracks to recreate the original piece. Unfortunately, I could not involve Ursula Bogner in the mixing process as well as in the presentation of her graphical work as she passed away in 1994.

My thanks go out to the Bogner family, especially Sebastian Bogner, who was generous enough to grant me access to the reels and supply me with invaluable insights into his mother's life. I hope that listeners will enjoy the same exhilaration I experienced on discovery of Ursula Bogner's music.

Jan Jelinek



Ursula Bogner, 1978



Orgonakkumulator (Foto: James DeMeo)



Ursula Bogner, 1966