

Even in the midst of a pandemic, I was given the opportunity to reflect, create, and share music with the beautiful city of Krems for one month—something for which I am very grateful. The city is positively flowing with galleries, museums, architecture and churches, which I find impressive for its size. Paula Haslinger from Klangraum Krems was particularly generous in making sure I had everything I needed, even taking me on a personal tour of the Minoritenkirche and organising a session for me with a local organist at the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde. I had all the mental and physical space that I could have wanted.

The very large and comfortable studio space, availability of equipment, and generosity of Paula were clear advantages of the residency (not to mention, a comfortable stipend). I really felt that I was able to immerse myself in my projects, as well as soak up the narrative of Krems, which informed a lot of the work that I did here. The only disadvantages were obvious consequences of the coronavirus pandemic of which the residency program had no control—social isolation, lack of collaboration with other artists, and a bit of loneliness.

I would have loved to meet more musicians and members of the public at performances at Klangraum Krems, and to realise a project of my own at the Minoritenkirche. While neither of these things were possible, I consider it very fortunate that I was still able to present something to my fellow artists in residence and give something back to AiR Niederösterreich with a soundwalk, which I hope will soon be available to the community of Krems.



*The medieval town of Stein*

One year on from the start of the pandemic, musicians in particular have had to adapt to the ways in which we can still enjoy music together in a physically distanced manner, and that's why I wanted to compose a soundwalk. The piece is designed for headphones with

ambisonic spatialisation, immersing the listener in the soundscape while they walk the suggested route that I mapped out for them in Stein. My hope is that, by implementing audio and musical immersion, the listener might be able to perceive Stein in a new and different way, even if they already have intimate knowledge of the town.

Conceptually, the soundscape focuses on themes of utopia and dystopia, taking advantage of the effect that sound can have on perception to blur the lines between these two ideological concepts. This was partially an elaboration of themes that I commonly explore in music—the coexistence of binary opposites in human nature—but it was also heavily influenced by the religious history of Krems. Krems has an unusually high concentration of churches for such a small place, and even though many of them have been secularised, I could still feel the influence of this Catholic-majority country in many ways (such as with food traditions and architecture). Even hearing the local greeting, ‘Grüß Gott’, reminds you of how deeply ingrained Catholicism is in Austrian culture, compared to some of its German-speaking neighbours.

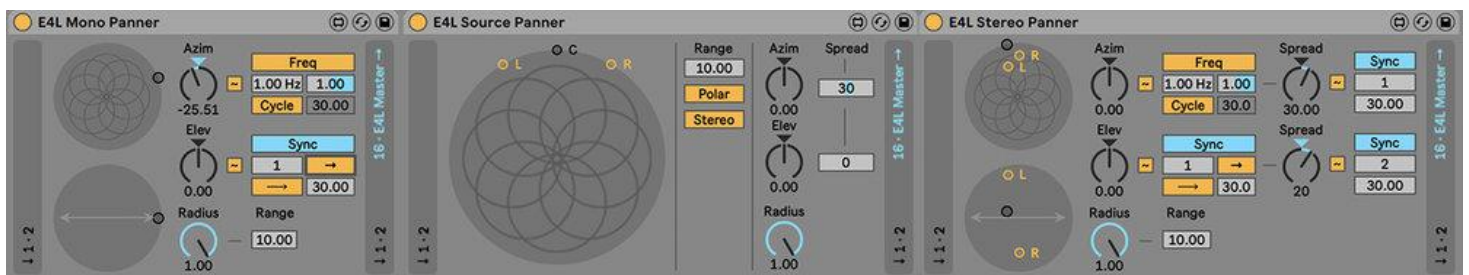
While I myself lack a religious identity, thoughts on the matter, coupled with the experience of being in Krems during the religious holiday of Easter, led me to reflect deeply on the meaning of transcendence, utopia, and existence itself. While these thoughts would sometimes lead to darker places, such as nihilism, dystopia, and the meaning of death, I tried to embrace these concepts as necessary to their respective positive counterparts, and communicate that in the soundwalk. Simply put, utopia cannot exist without dystopia, and it’s impossible to perceive one without elements of the other.



*Paula Haslinger taking my soundwalk*

The soundwalk takes the listener to several 'checkpoints' in Stein, including the spectacular view of the Danube from the Frauenbergkirche. Coupled with processed field recordings done mostly in Krems, a main feature of the aesthetic of the soundscape is the church bell (both raw and synthesised). The bells were recorded from three different churches, and by putting them all together, I wanted to aurally simulate the feeling I had when walking anywhere in Krems before a mass. Every evening at 18:30 or 19:00 (depending on the day), all the bells would explode like a sonorous volcano. Other features of the soundwalk include the organ of the Evangelische Pfarrgemeinde and Bach choral music.

The other project I managed to complete at Krems was *Okiku*, a new electroacoustic piece for recorder, classical guitar, handbells, and electronics. Although I arrived in Krems having already done the preliminary recordings with Emily Bannister—my friend and collaborator—I completed the composition, including its spatialisation element, during my residency. *Okiku* has a strong narrative element. It's named after the Japanese folklore tale of Okiku, a servant girl who is deceived by the samurai of her master, who resorts to threats when Okiku repeatedly refuses his sexual advances. Eventually, Okiku throws herself into the well, choosing death over the decimation of her morals.



*E4L Panner, an Ableton Live plug-in that enables spatial audio rendering*

The spatial aspect of *Okiku* is central to its narrative, as I continue to explore ways to compose with space as well as time.

Overall, my residency with AiR Niederösterreich has been a special and productive time for me. While I missed many of the social and collaborative aspects that come with artist residencies under non-pandemic conditions, I very much appreciated having the space to reflect and create, all the while enjoying the beautiful nature of Wachau and getting a feel for the unique culture of Krems.