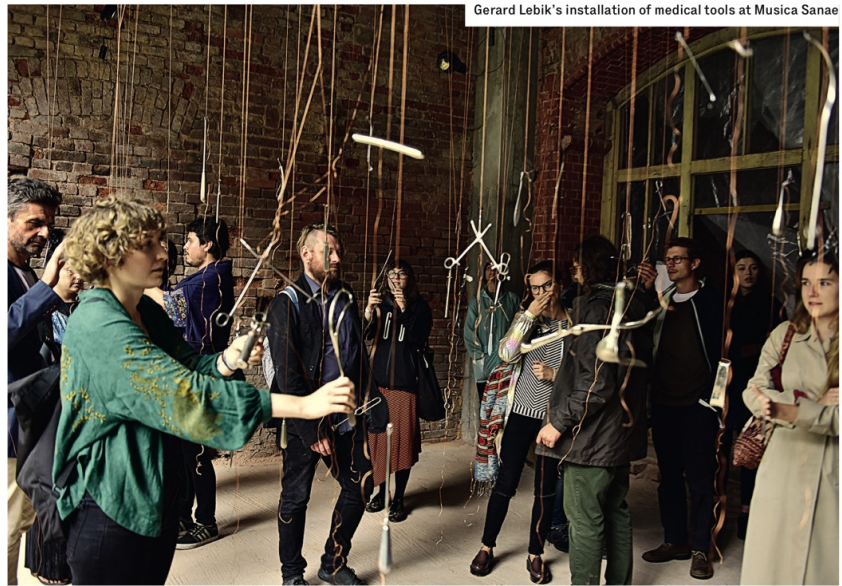


## Global Ear

A sanatorium in the Central European border village of **Sokołowsko** plays host to a festival celebrating and interrogating healing vibrations and sounds of the body. By **Biba Kopf**



Gerard Lebik's installation of medical tools at Musica Sanae

**Sound and sickness** have always made natural bedfellows, be it in the form of a muse strumming a harp to nurse a loved one back to health, or a more forensic coupling of noise journeying through a damaged body to root out the causes of that which ails it. The stethoscope was invented some 200 years ago by a French doctor with a view to protecting the modesty of his women patients by putting some distance between their chests and his ears as he examined their beats and pulses for tell-tale signs of a troubled heart or lungs. Then as now, as a listening device, the stethoscope's medical uses are beyond reproach; transformed into a musical instrument the reverse is true. On a balmy late summer morning in a public square in Sokołowsko, I'm submitting myself not so much to a medical examination as a highly intimate demonstration of the sound generating qualities of a medical device transformed into a musical instrument. The latter is adapted from two pairs of stethoscopes, one set connecting my ears to that of the Phonoscope project's Thierry Madiot's. We can't help but stare each other in the face as he subjects me to an avalanche of pulses and tones, tapped from various bony parts of his face and head, or directly on his end of the stethoscope, that is when he's not sawing or singing sounds from his teeth and tongue so up close and personal, I'd faint if I was any less vulgar.

Once it's over, my heightened state of listening overcomes any feelings of embarrassment as I descend the slope back to Dr Brehmer's sanatorium. Founded in 1849 when Sokołowsko, now in Poland, was the German Lower Silesian village of Gubersdorf, over three still balmy late summer days in August this historical site plays host to Sanatorium Of Sound/ Musica Sanae festival, co-curated by Michał Libera and the Sokołowsko couple of In Situ Contemporary Art Foundation's Zuzanna Fogtt and sound artist Gerard Lebik. The Musica Sanae side of the equation is relatively new, this Sokołowsko related event being the second of three MS festivals run throughout

this year (the first happened in Naples and the third is going on this month in Berlin), but Sanatorium Of Sound has been pulling sizeable crowds to tiny, tranquil Sokołowsko near the Czech Republic border for the past few years.

Not that you'd notice: whether they're attending events in the ruins of the sanatorium, still undergoing renovation following the fire that destroyed much of it in 2008, the neighbouring villas that once housed medical practitioners and wealthier patients attending the sanatorium, or the wonderful brokedown palace that is the Zdrowie Cinema, the village itself always appears to be empty of people whenever you stroll through it. Its leafy squares, alleys and streets are only sporadically dotted with a few cafes, bars and shops, and you have to travel a few kilometres to the next inhabited zone to find an ATM. Yet since Zuzanna Fogtt's mother, the renowned 1970s Polish avant garde artist Bożenna Biskupska, and her photographer and installation artist partner the late Zygmunt Rytka, moved in some 15 years ago, it has been transformed into an artists' colony. That the late film director Krzysztof Kieslowski has a square named after him for having spent nine years of his childhood here with his sick father, enhances its status. For all these star names and attractions, however, a sense of modesty as befits its medical theme is the defining characteristic of the festival.

In his Musica Sanae manifesto, Libera focuses on the stethoscope as both a listening and sound generating device, remarking on "the desire to hear more than we can, to hear the tiniest sound, to hear what is completely mute like tumours in our lungs, diseases in our brains and bacteria in our throats. Today, we do, we can hear it all and we can hear it as much in the field of medicine as music – from experimental to pop.

"On the other hand," he continues, "medicine gained a lot from music and sound discourse. Discovery of wave theory of sound proved that we

only hear a limited range of what could be potentially heard... Since the rise of the modern era, music and medicine have been coming together in a strange feedback loop. Its shared territory is obviously delineated by the phenomena of listening." The feedback loop described by Libera is starkly realised in co-curator Lebik's simple sound installation in a sanatorium wing with no outside wall. Consisting of various antique medical instruments dangling from the ceiling, their tinkling and distorting noises raise frissons of a childhood fear of doctors as you cause them to collide while walking through them.

The medical act of listening as a paradoxical means of making music is more winningly proposed during Luciano Chessa's performance cum demonstration involving hearing aids, medical instruments and a handful of brass bells, wherein he fine-tunes the high-pitched frequencies drawn out of the turned up aids swirled in a glass over pleasantly rattling percussion. A somewhat darker demonstration of sound as a salve for pain is the tableau vivant of a girl discussing debilitating bouts of hysteria enacted by vocalist Barbara Kinga Majewska over lithophone player Tony Di Napoli's deeply resonating and reverberating stones.

Meanwhile, more complicated diagnoses are carried out elsewhere in the festival programme. Carl Michael von Hausswolff's performance is based on a "sonic extraction of HIV virus's DNA chain". It's appropriately as eviscerating as it is queasily moving. So too the wonderfully hallucinatory set from Swiss body-battering noise veteran Rudolf Eb.er. Most stunning of all, however, is Rashad Becker's performance "based on a true story – chapter k for klinik incorporating texts of the sozialistisches patienten kollektiv", digitally congealed from the muttered writings and statements of a 1970s West German radical movement in revolt against capitalism as a symptom of mental illness. For this sickness, in particular, there's still no known cure. □

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