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## Norbert Stein: Graffiti Suite

Norbert Stein | PATA Music

By [Lyn Horton](#)



Norbert Stein  
*Graffiti Suite*  
Pata Music  
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Interaction among separate elements can have greater impact than the individual actions of those elements. The process is called synergy. Synergy works on all levels and is an important

factor behind the successful outcomes that can emerge from collaborative effort--and it can be powerfully productive when individuals get together to make music.

Composer/conductor/musician Norbert Stein's double-disc *Graffiti Suite*, performed by the NDR (North German Broadcasting) big band, has all the ingredients that allow synergy to work. On the macro scale are the band, Stein's composition and the language the composition is built on. Separating these three units means seeing the players and their instruments as the band and the composition as being a systematized set of parts, each of which also contains sub-sets of parts. How powerfully the language of the composition influences the interaction of the parts (band members to instruments to each aspect of the composition) equals the music.

Stein's compositions are based on a language of graphic representations of the way in which he wants the sound to be constructed. He has developed this language through some thirty years of involvement with improvised music. When the idea of graffiti--images seemingly dissociated, but bearing a stylistic resemblance and grouped together on one surface--is likened to Stein's music, one can imagine the application of his graphic language to determine the music's process.

The first disc opens with an orchestral blast stating its formal presence. "Franz Pataeng" progresses in a fashion that seems to be compartmentalized but, as it unfolds, begins to make musical sense as the addition of each layer of sound increases the piece's density and dynamic. The soundscape of this four-part work changes from high to low, continuous to discrete, harmonious to

dissonant, ornamental to chordal, through one high-lighted single instrument to a large number of instruments. The following “U.B.U” has similar characteristics.

Stein turns the textural corner in “Music In Seven Houses.” Here he chooses to isolate different instruments, before gradually pulling them together so that their coloration builds the architecture of sonority. The individual instruments often take the lead, but escape their isolation quickly. Towards the end, the introduction of a rhythmic pattern that straddles an extended sequence of chords played by the brass, provides a stark contrast to the abstract character of the first half of the first disc.

On the second disc, the rhythmic content carries the thrust for “Flocking Birds.” The music becomes a programmatic portrait of the dynamics of a natural phenomenon as interpreted by Stein. The lead instruments change from part to part to alter the focus of the flow, which glides evenly, the way birds fly together, moving their wings unsynchronistically but to the same purpose. The electric guitar, trumpet, trombone and saxophone govern the instrumental direction over a vocal or brass chordal drone and spry tabla or drum rallies.

The final passages of the track slowly devolve from orchestral blasts of sound into groups of fluttering male voices, percussive snippets and instrumental blurts which, when combined, paint a picture of a flock of birds at rest on a plain, chattering and reassembling before the next leg of migratory flight. The music then disappears gradually, as if moving far away into the distance.

“Hot Spots, Tai Chi & More” concludes the suite. A quick, tight pace runs through its three parts. First off, a trombone and a muted trumpet anchor the traveling motion within a bass and percussion background, propelling the music forward. Then the alto and tenor saxophones, joined by pounding bass and tuba, maintain a dry, rhythmic, machine-like timbre, with an oddly oriental dissonance, eventually reaching a strange, yet transitory, heaviness. New, lightened atmospheric patterns yield to a conversation between trumpet, saxophone, piano, bass and percussion. Eventually, the individual instruments succumb to the band-community in a startling and conclusive march.

Stein borrowed the term “pata” for his recording label from a scientist who theorized a physics that worked outside of the realm of logic and causality. The resultant non-lyrical, non-poetic structure of *Graffiti Suite* complies with that ethic of unrelatedness--but were it not for the inherent synergistic principle that exists within the music, its integrity would elude us.

Tracks: CD1: Franz Pataeng: Part I-IV; U.B.U.: No.w.here; Music In Seven Houses: First To Seventh House. CD2: Flocking Birds: The Mountain, Purgatory Of vowels, Bird's Flight; Hot Spots, Tai Chi & More: Global positions, Machine poeple, Zigzag Aethernitas.

Personnel: Thorsten Benkenstein: trumpet; Ingolf Burkhardt: trumpet; Claus Stötter: trumpet; Michael Leuschner: trumpet; Philipp Kacza: trumpet; Fiete Feisch, alto saxophone, clarinet, recorder; Peter Bolte: alto saxophone, clarinet, flute; Christoph Lauer: tenor saxophone, flute; Lutz Büchner: tenor

saxophone, clarinet, flute; Frank Delle: baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, flute; Markus Steinhäuser: tenor saxophone; Gabriel Coburger: tenor saxophone; Dan Gottshall: trombone; Sebastian Hoffman: trombone; Stefan Lottermann: trombone; Ingo Lahme: bass trombone, tuba; Christophe Schweizer: trombone; Stephan Diez: guitar; Lucas Lindholm: double bass; Vladyslav Sendekci: piano; Marcio Doctor: percussion; Mark Nauseef: drums; Norbert Stein: conductor.

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