

"It moves everyone who takes an interest in it"

Interview with Antonio Bras about his musical interpretation for the silent film classic "Metropolis"
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Sindelfingen – The silent movie "Metropolis" from 1927 is one of the most famous science fiction films and it continues to inspire new musical interpretations to this day. The Sindelfingen-based graphic designer and media artist Antonio Bras has created a modern electronic score for the film.

The combination of images and music is being performed for the first time on Saturday at Sindelfingen's Pavillon, Calwer Straße 36, from 8.30 pm.

Antonio Bras saw "Metropolis" for the first time in a Berlin cinema at the age of 16 and he was immediately fascinated. Four years later, he began making music and working as a DJ. In 2001, Bras produced his first score for "Metropolis", which was premiered at the arts centre Movida in Sindelfingen. Now the 42-year-old has come up with a completely new score for the film which he is touring Germany with. Before the premiere showing at the Pavillon on Saturday, KREISZEITUNG interviewed Bras.

How did you end up doing this project? What inspired you?

I got the idea in the mid-90s at two electronic-techno parties where the film was being beamed onto a wall and onto the dancing audience. Taken completely out of context the film and music blended to create something completely new. But what struck me most at the time was the reaction of the guests who showed a particularly keen interest in the film itself. This is when I decided I wanted to transport the film, its meaning and content into the present day – and to address a younger audience through the music.

How do you go about writing a score?

Since I started making music, I've always worked with electronic sound equipment and early on, I started producing experimental sound collages, some of which have been used for documentaries or shown at exhibitions or performances, for example at "1 Site – 2 Places" on the Rathausplatz in Sindelfingen. Most of the scores produced for "Metropolis" to date are very classically oriented in terms of instrumentation. I opted for a combination of both classical and electronic music to appeal to a younger audience.

And how do you do this?

I use a combination of musical techniques with samplers, mixes, CDs, synthesizers, drum computer, which I have developed over the last three years. Parts of carefully selected pieces are played, distorted and superimposed with live electronic sounds and compositions. Just imagine two DJs mixing music at the same time with a band playing live improvisations. The only difference is that there's just one person doing it all.

Is the film "Metropolis" especially suited to new musical interpretation?

No more or less than any other silent movie. The special thing about "Metropolis", however, is that the film has so many different levels. Various themes are superimposed onto each other, as are the sounds in my new score. We have the utopian city. We have a two-tier society, which appears to be modern but is also mystical, and lots more – in other words, an ideal starting point for different musical interpretations.

To what extent does the music give the film a new quality? Do you think the film has a greater impact when set to music than when shown as a silent movie?

If my new score can bring the film to an audience in the present day, then my dream has come true and all my efforts in the last few years have been worthwhile. It's up to each and every visitor to decide whether the film has a new quality or not. I'm personally convinced of this. And who knows what will happen musically in the next few years? A composer once said that "Metropolis" needs new music every ten years.

Films – whether silent or not – would be inconceivable without music. The music conveys feelings and intensifies the emotions of the viewers which are expressed by the images. I imagine watching a silent film without music in a packed cinema and only the noises made by your neighbour to be a rather oppressive experience.

Do you consider "Metropolis" to be a modern film? Can we learn anything from it today, or is it "merely" an artistic document of the times?

The relevance of its subject still makes "Metropolis" seem modern even today. It'll probably only start to fade when we've learnt to draw conclusions about the way we deal with each other and this world in which we live. I would definitely hope it doesn't remain a utopia. In this respect, "Metropolis" doesn't just remain an artistic document of the times – even if, from a modern-day perspective, the content seems rather naïve and banal. It touches everyone who takes an interest in it.

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