



Simon Berz

The musician Simon Berz draws unusual sounds from his instruments and encourages his drumming students to follow their own path.

Simon Berz is a passionate educator, bursting with creativity and vigour. But he did not enjoy being a primary school teacher day in, day out. It made him feel trapped, giving him an inescapable and overwhelming desire to throw away the teaching syllabus and do things differently. His studies in therapeutic education and drumming lessons did nothing to alleviate this feeling. So he abandoned his primary school teaching career, went to New York to study drumming and set up the "Badabum" platform for artists. Back in Switzerland, he established a private drumming school in Zug and devised music projects involving children and young people.

He does not like the way drumming is taught in some places: "Anyone who does things differently is ostracised". They are considered too loud, too quiet, too fast, too slow – or too bold. One of Berz's students gets into trouble wherever he goes, be it at school, at home or with the police. But not with Berz. Berz lets him play as part of a group, and places an eight-year-old fledgling drummer under his supervision. The boy has not disappointed him.

In Berz's lessons, the students sit in an African-style formation, arranged in a circle behind their drums. Under his guidance, the group produces a magical effect. It urges on the more timid members and pulls the reins on those in need of restraint. The group forms a constant point of reference, which supports the individual players while uniting them in their common goal of making music together. "Learning in a circle gives everyone the freedom to let off steam and contribute their own ideas. And it spurs on the students to practise and be creative".

On days when he is not teaching, Berz examines the transitions between music, sound and noise and invents new instruments. Fabricating instruments from items he has collected throughout his life and things he has discovered in nature, at flea markets or from rubbish, he draws sounds out of them that a computer could never produce. His latest musical instrument is the "Lithophone", which features in his current tour. It is made from slate that Berz found on the edge of a path in France. Berz has also co-produced a documentary film called "liquid land" in New Orleans, together with the film-maker Michelle Ettlin. It is about making instruments out of rubbish and about the social power of music. An accompanying CD has also been released.

What is important to him is to struggle against mediocrity, against the middle path, and against following rules unthinkingly. Music, his projects and his students are close to his heart. He wants to open up a world for them which stimulates sincere, personal commitment and is free from consumerism and brand pressure. In Berz's world, children are encouraged to be sensitive and critical. He wants to unsettle them, he says with a hint of mischief, so that they can build up courage and break

Further information

If you would like to discover more about Simon Berz and his activities, click on the links below.

www.simonberz.ch

www.badabum.ch

www.schlagzeugatelier.ch

free from the expectations of others that are not their own. He wants them to find their own way.