**Surrounded by Music**- an interview with Danish musician Ras Bolding

**In my hometown Odense, Denmark, most people look a bit boring, wearing dark blue, brown, or black clothes, trying hard to look like everyone else. One of the few exceptions is the musician Ras Bolding, and as he lives in the same neighbourhood as me, I visited him on an almost spring-like day in February. Over a cup of tea, I got to know a bit about what makes this both musically and visually striking artist tick.**

As soon as you enter Bolding’s home, it is clear, that this is the home of a musician. Most of the living room is turned into a sound studio dominated by synthesizers. The dark room with blue-green lighting and black, drawn curtains is in sync with the musician’s characteristic appearance which include a dyed mohawk and heavy, black eye make-up.

Ras Bolding says that he has lived in the neighbourhood since the spring of 2017 and that he moved here because there was no room for more synthesizers where he lived before. Here in the living room, on the other hand, there is enough space for him to set up his equipment 1:1 as on stage, which makes it easier to practice for concerts.

“Furthermore, there is a practical aspect of moving here,” says Bolding. “Because as most of my activities take place in the city, an address in the city centre is preferable.”

**The Artist**

“I was born here in Odense, and I was always surrounded by music,” says Ras Bolding. “There is a picture of me as a child, standing at my grandmother’s piano, barely able to reach the keys. Both my parents played music, and at an early age I was offered violin lessons, but I turned them down – unfortunately – as it was the electronic music that attracted me. I wanted to play the synthesizer, because I grew up with Jean-Michel Jarre and the entire electronic wave.”

“When you came from Odense south, and money was scarce, buying a synthesizer was not an option, so I started making music on a Commodore 64 computer,” Bolding explains, “You could get music programmes for it, and you could also use it for instrumental music, as you could play directly on the keys.”

Although Bolding is well-educated, having for instance an English major and a Masters-degree in Multimedia, he is autodidact as a musician.

“I did it the hard way through trial and error,” he explains, “and you either learn a lot from it, or you give up.”

Bolding didn’t give up.

**The Music**

Ras Bolding’s music is often described as a cross between electronic music, punk and new wave performed on synthesizers, but Bolding himself is not much for being put in a box.

“My music is wide-ranging,” he explains. “Not least in terms of interpretation. The musicians I always return to are some who have covered a lot of ground and found new paths with their music.”

The artists who recur in our conversation are Jean-Michel Jarre, Kraftwerk, Klaus Nomi, Mike Oldfield, Brian Eno, Gary Numan and Kate Bush to mention a few, and you can find a certain kinship between their music and Bolding’s.

“Music made for computer games has also struck a chord with me,” says Bolding and continues, “When I write music, the melody comes first, because the melodic aspects fascinate me. Why, for example, is Johann Sebastian Bach good? If you ask random people on the street, you may be lucky to meet a music student who can explain why, but if you hum” – here Bolding hums excerpts from *The Brandenburg Concertos, The Well-Tempered Clavier*, and *The Goldberg Variations* – “everyone knows them. The music still holds up. That’s what music can do.”

“The lyrics follows quickly after,” continues Bolding. “This happens almost automatically, because the number of syllables in the words must fit the notes in the music, and I am not one to stretch the vocals over several notes to make it fit. Arrogant as I am, I also consider myself above using filler words such as yeah and very. The lyrics I write are mainly in English, but I also write in Danish in for instance my Hans Christian Andersen pieces.”

Like Ras Bolding (and me) the famous fairy tale writer Hans Christian Andersen is a native of Odense, and Ras Bolding has written an entire suite of numbers based on Andersen’s darker fairy tales such as *The Shadow*, *The Little Match Girl* and *The Story of a Mother*, which Bolding has performed for the past many years at the annual H. C. Andersen Festivals here in Odense. Furthermore, Bolding writes ˈtech lyricsˈ such as *8-Bit Kit*, *Load Error* and *Ghost In The Machine*, as well as socially critical lyrics such as *Have a Nice Day* and *Ruth*. He also makes cover versions of for instance the Martin Galway soundtrack to the *Arkanoid* Commodore 64 game, and tributes to the likes of *Blade Runner* and *The Rocky Horror Show.*

“Most of the numbers I write have lyrics, but I also work instrumentally,” says Bolding, “and my musical works are - diplomatically speaking - not what you will find in rotation at the established radio stations.”

**The Recordings**

Ras Bolding considers himself lucky to have been born in the digital age.

“The Internet has become the huge game-changer,” he explains. “Today, you can record and mix your music at home, and when you play a synthesizer, you are not dependent on the acoustics of the room the way symphony orchestras or opera singers are. Those who work in big studios will probably say that the last 10% of the sound is missing when you record at home, but even Jean-Michel Jarre recorded the album *Oxygène* in his kitchen.”

“I am in charge of my own mix/mastering process, and it is a battle against myself, because there is only one person to make the decisions,” says Ras Bolding. “When you have finally made something that you think is good, it has gradually become part of my process to hear it through other people´s music systems as well, and then it often sounds different and maybe not as good, but those are the conditions. It is a tiring process, as you are responsible for everything yourself, but it is also fascinating.”

**The Concerts**

“I started giving concerts early on, because concerts create visibility,” says Ras Bolding. "The audience becomes aware of the music through concerts, and contact with the audience is essential. It is a paradox, because you are dependent on the audience, but on the other hand you must not be dependent on them in the creative process. However, admittedly everyone in the industry craves recognition, and here I have a funny anecdote, because I once met Karlheinz Stockhausen in a toilet, and he said something to me that I still remember. He said, “We of the Darmstadt School were never indifferent to the audience.” He is considered one of the most inaccessible composers, but he too needed audience contact. I am glad this is what he said to me.”

Ras Bolding does have quite a spectacular stage show, which includes eye-catching stage clothes and stage performances as well as an impressive laser show. He has two young female musicians with him on stage. There have been quite a few changes over the years, but the current line-up consists of Olivia Obskur and Emmelie Eddike, Obskur and Eddike being Danish words meaning Obscure and Vinegar.

“The alliterative nicknames started as a joke with former musicians and now it has become a tradition,” explains Ras Bolding. “The fact that I have two women with me on stage is because I often have an extra vocal on my numbers, which is sung by a woman, so it is practical to have a female musician who can sing and play a bit synthesizer. It is Obskur who has the vocal parts, but should she be prevented, she would have to be replaced by another musician, who then must be a woman too, in order to do the vocals. In addition, it is good to have young energy on stage, so you don’t get stuck in a nostalgia groove, and when the musicians are young, they do not yet suffer from the popular diseases called real work and real children but have more control over their time. It takes a lot of time to rehearse and travel for concerts.”

“We have performed in many different places in Denmark and abroad and in many different contexts, not just at the usual venues and festivals, but in everything from an SM club to The Hans Christian Andersen’s Museum,” says Bolding. “During the Corona virus lockdown, we even gave a concert at the venue Magasinet here in Odense for ghosts, because the only sure way the audience would not be infected with COVID-19 was if they were already dead. Now, however, we play for the living again.”

“We have started using hologram graphics on stage, created by American Max Kaos, who is also on stage,” continues Bolding. “We would like to add more screens for projecting drawings as well, a kind of gothic children’s book illustrations that fit the lyrics. It will be interesting to compare the hologram graphics, where everything is programmed and points towards the future, with hand drawings, which are one of the oldest visual expressions. I have a visual approach to things as I have always drawn. At school I was the kid who drew on the desks, and today I make a cartoon that serves as promotion for Klub Golem.”

**Klub Golem**

You cannot say Ras Bolding without saying Klub Golem, a local alternative club that has existed for almost seventeen years now.

“The club was founded in 2006,” says Ras Bolding. “I had previously run a similar club with three others, but they all moved to Copenhagen, so I contacted some new people. We got Klub Golem up and running, and it was an immediate success. We began our existence at the local cultural centre Badstuen, and when it was closed and most activities moved to the new cultural centre Kulturmaskinen, we moved as well, and we are still there.”

“Klub Golem is a club for alternative music and culture, and it is a mixed crowd that attends,” continues Bolding. “Not only can you be yourself here, you can also be whoever you want to be. The club is open six or seven times a year, and there are over a hundred visitors each time. This is a main reason as to why I have stayed in Odense. Hans Christian Andersen and the hipsters all fled to Copenhagen, but I am neither Hans Christian Andersen nor a hipster, so I’ll stay here, because when you get something like this up and running, the only decent thing is to stay.”

The next Club Golem will be held on April 8, 2023, at Kulturmaskinen, Odense, Denmark <https://kulturmaskinen.dk/events/klub-golem-totenwald-1>

If you want to know more about Ras Bolding, you can check him out online:

[www.rasbolding.com](http://www.rasbolding.com)

[www.facebook.com/rasboldingmusic](http://www.facebook.com/rasboldingmusic)

[www.soundcloud.com/ras-bolding](http://www.soundcloud.com/ras-bolding)

[www.instagram.com/ras.bolding](http://www.instagram.com/ras.bolding)

[www.youtube.com/rasbolding](http://www.youtube.com/rasbolding)