

SOUND IN THE MACHINE

Written, produced and edited by Brian Snead



EPISODE TITLE

Special #2a: Shoebox Shots from Berlin

TIME

13:54

DATE OF WRITING

June 2009 – August 2009 (off and on)

PUBLICATION INFO

Date: 6 August 2009

Number: 9

Format: MP3

Location: Sound in the Machine.org

< <http://soundinthemachine.org/2009/08/06/shoebox-shots-from-berlin.aspx> >

SUMMARY

Everyday sounds from a Christmas vacation spent in Berlin. While hanging out at my wife's grandmother's placeover cake and coffee, out came a shoebox filled with piles of old snapshots. *That's it*, I thought, *why not do the same thing with audio?* And here we are.

SOUND IN THE MACHINE

Special #2: Shoebox Shots from Berlin



published 6 August 2009 at soundinthemachine.org.

By Brian Snead

TRANSCRIPT

Shoebox Shots from Berlin is all about everyday sounds from a Christmas vacation spent in Berlin. I'd already been recording stuff here and there with a digital handheld recorder, but I figured I'd just use the material for a library of samples. And maybe I'd make a CD and put it on when I needed some escapism. But for a podcast? Stringing together a bunch of sounds seemed boorish; narrating, obnoxious. Then I got my metaphor. While hanging out at my wife's grandmother's place over cake and coffee, out came a shoebox filled with piles of old snapshots. *That's it*, I thought, *why not do the same thing with audio?* And here we are.

Editing through the several hours of stuff I got, I was thinking of one thing: don't over-think it. If those snapshots floating around in grandma's shoebox could speak for themselves, why not these sound? Of course we're conditioned to expect the exact opposite from sounds. They're usually presented as one-dimensional units: all figure and no ground. But *pictures* aren't like that. Even if it's something really important, like a shot from your grandparents' wedding reception, there's still a tree behind them and maybe a kid running around in the distance, there's a table cloth on the table and a cloud in the sky. And we get it, we know how to make sense of the image, what's important, what's not, even though it's all of it an illusion. But who ever learns to listen to recordings and the sounds around them like this? We almost always rely on some kind of image to tell us how to make sense of the soundscape. Oddly, neither the photograph nor the phonograph are illusions to us, somehow. We *will* our eyes to override our brains in the case of the photograph; our ears are just very easily duped.

While I'm at it, I want to draw your attention to the machine. In editing this material, I've not hidden the artifacts of the machine I used to record this stuff. You always see the camera, whether you realize it or not—there's depth of field and lens aberrations—and you always see the borders of the photos and the lack or over-saturation of color. And everything is way too small, totally out of scale and two-dimensional, to boot. So, on these recordings you hear

my fingers on the recorder, the wind in the microphones, and the compressor pumping from time to time. Sounds will be too loud and sounds will be too soft, the slight fades are completely manufactured, the MP3 will strip out much of the original richness and stuff *junk* in the holes. I could go on. But these “extra” sounds are just as much a part of the experience of listening to a recording as the camera that’s made any picture you’ve ever seen. Not to forget, however, that it’s all an illusion.

And by the way, if you really want to know the locations and situations of these recordings, check out the transcript for this episode at [Sound in the Machine.org](http://SoundintheMachine.org).

So, now my box of shots from my most beloved of all cities, Berlin.

List of Locations:

- **3:33** Playground at Helmholtzplatz, Prenzlauer Berg
- **3:48** Exiting café on the corner of Danziger Strasse, Prenzlauer Berg, headed towards the Eberswalder Strasse train station
- **4:35** Christmas market (2005)- this was recorded with a camera. Used it because I could, also because there is a marked difference in the audio and I wanted listeners to notice.
- **4:49** Alexa (new mall at Alexanderplatz)
- **5:12** Parisier Platz / Brandenburg Gate
- **5:46** Christmas Market, Potsdamer Platz- the laughs are from people on a giant slide
- **6:04** Churchbells from the window of our apartment in Friedrichshain
- **6:25** Party at the (now demolished) Palast der Republic- last one ever (2005, also recorded with a camera)
- **6:42** Bunker tour, Wuensdorf
- **7:05** U2, entered at Alexanderplatz, headed north (Pankow)
- **8:21** New Year’s Eve fireworks from the window of our apartment in Friedrichshain, 9pm before things really got going
- **8:58** In the tunnel headed towards the trains at Potsdamer Platz
- **9:29** Entering our apartment building in Friedrichshain, elevator
- **9:50** Exiting train station (ascending stairs)...
- **10:04** Bunker tour, Wuensdorf (ascending stairs)
- **10:25** In our Friedrichshain apartment with the typical sounds- Chicken Invaders, cheesy German Christmas songs, window open
- **10:40** S-Bahn (direction Zeuthen), this conversation cracked me up
- **11:11** Danziger Strasse / Lychener Strasse in Prenzlauer Berg
- **11:45** Café in Prenzlauer Berg
- **12:17** New Years Eve/Day midnight- from the apartment. Unbelievably loud. Fireworks lighting up the sky
- **13:08** Same playground as first sample in Prenzlauer Berg (this little girl talking was very, very cute)