

Austrian Trio Is Focused on Its Beat

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By BEN RATLIFF

Radian, the Austrian electronic trio, plays with a beat. But it's an ingrown beat, the kind of rhythm you might hear when walking alone in the country: the crunch of gravel under your feet, the regular pattern of your breathing.

At Tonic on the Lower East Side on Thursday, these three musicians presented their new music, to be released on a record from the American label Thrill Jockey. It is at once more exploratory and more dramatic than their two previous albums.

The focus of the band - or so it seems - is the drummer Martin Brandlmayr, who uses a drum kit while monitoring sound files on a laptop computer. Like a good deal of the new improvised electronic music, the music he's playing with is the sound of digital communication: hisses, telephone connection tones, static. But he finds ways to incorporate small, dry and effective funk rhythms inside those sounds, and the result is that the drumming sounds of the music, not superimposed on to it.

John Norman, the bassist, never just let a note be sounded and then decay on its own; with a volume pedal, he swelled in and out of his notes and made irregularly placed blobs of sound, like the bass lines in dub reggae. And Stefan Nemeth, manning digital and analog synthesizers, made the music creep up, expand and contract and change character.

This is a group that shuns improvisation, creating in a club show a louder, better-heard copy of its recorded music. But Radian has become more extroverted since its first recordings four years ago: its funk is more insistent, its emotional peaks (if we can call untempered noise emotional) higher, its volume louder. It has gone beyond its initial conceit of something like fax-tones with a beat; it is a band with an impressively original density and texture.