

MUSIC REVIEW

Knocking, Twitching, Buzzing, RASPING



Willie Davis for The New York Times

Stefan Nemeth, Martin Brandlmayr and John Norman of Radian, performing at Union Pool in Williamsburg.

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In most rock songs the landmarks are standard ones: the beat, the riffs, the lyric. [Radian](#), an Austrian instrumental trio that played Union Pool in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on Wednesday night as part of a rare United States tour, sets most of those aside. Its music features sounds that are more often treated as glitches. Instead of melodies there are buzzes, thuds, creaks, high-pitched electronic hums or crackles of static. Silence too. There's no predicting when an element that had been consistent will suddenly disappear. Radian replaces landmarks with potholes. It makes for a bumpy, mesmerizing ride.

Radian thoroughly mingles the hand-played and the electronic. It was impossible to tell, watching Stefan Németh behind his table full of patch cords, whether he was generating sounds or playing samples at any given moment; nor did it matter. Every so often he switched to guitar, an instrument Radian added on its 2009 album "[Chimeric](#)" ([Thrill Jockey](#)); he scraped the strings, dispensed stray chords or administered furious and exact bursts of tremolo strumming. Martin Brandlmayr — playing his drum kit with brushes, mallets, sticks and a bow and, at one point, tapping cymbals with tuning forks — also had a computer at his disposal. John Norman on electric bass was the band's fulcrum, hinting at funk, dub reggae or simply a deep pulse, without any guarantee it would last.

Each piece headed in a different direction. One opened with knocking, stop-start drums; one with twitchy, chattering electronics that could have turned into a dance track (but didn't); one with spacious, sustained feedback tones. At its closest approach to convention Radian stayed with a broad-shouldered rock march and a big crescendo, something like Mogwai or Godspeed You! Black Emperor. But it was just as compelling when it opened gaping holes in its music, revealing the squeak of a finger on a guitar string or turning a seemingly stray click into an essential part of a rhythm. [John Cage](#) would have been proud; though Radian's compositions leave little to chance, its music makes listeners hear overlooked sounds anew.