

FLAKE: JUST KEEP ON PEDALLING

Confessions from the Life of the Rammstein keyboard player: Christian Lorenz alias Flake has presented an existentially goofy gem of a book with his "It's the Worlds Birthday Today" („Heute hat die Welt Geburtstag“)

By Lars Weisbrod 27. September 2017

"Like I said, the things that look like a pushover are often the hardest of all. On the other hand, the things that look difficult are not easy, they're also difficult." What beautiful sentences, what beautiful thoughts, straightaway one would like to write like that, one would immediately like to imitate the tone in which the musician Christian „Flake“ Lorenz has written his fabulous memoirs, "It's the Worlds Birthday Today".

But the sentences are not just beautiful, they're also true, and that's why it's not at all easy to write the way he does. But that's not the only reason why "It's the Worlds Birthday Today" is a strange book, its content difficult to convey, even if formally it's as stringently structured as a song by the world-famous German band, Rammstein, in which Flake is the keyboard player. It alternates between humorous passages, in which Flake looks back on the band's early and middle years (when the record company wanted 46,000 marks from them, because on their first tour the ever-thirsty Rammstein members thought the minibar drinks in the hotels were free; or when they spent a night in prison in a US provincial town after a gig; or all the stuff the singer Til Lindemann stole from gas stations); as well as an extravagant conversation that Flake conducts with himself before, during and after a Rammstein concert in Budapest, one of those internationally notorious, for police and firemen troublingly crazy spectacles for which Rammstein are revered by millions of fans.

"Anyway", Flake reports from the stage, "Till is now shooting at me full-on with the Flammi, as we affectionately call the flamethrower." But Flake doesn't just have to deal with the pyrotechnics that the stage sadist Till Lindemann likes to fire at the helpless keyboard player, but also with his permanently smelly, clammy stage costumes, with rotten food, diarrhoea, bad luck with women (an awful lot in the early days, still a lot today) and with the fact that fans and fellow band members mostly lovingly ignore him: "I came sixth in an Internet poll for the most popular Rammstein member. That's not so good out of six people, but someone has to come last. And it's better if I'm the one, because I pretend I don't care." Other than that, Flake is occupied with highly existential questions such as the essence of time, death and the relationship between appearance and being.

Of course, the question whether the Rammstein keyboard player really does tick like that is not existential at all, but rather impertinent, i.e. whether he leads the same gaga existence as a shy, sickly, melancholic band mascot as the first-person narrator, on whom you have a crush after 50 pages at the latest. The answer doesn't really matter, because one way or the other Flake has managed to pull off quite a feat with "It's the Worlds Birthday Today". He rescues the super boring genre of the rock star biography because he plausibly retells the life story and the attitude of a character named Flake, who, Forrest Gump-like, has fallen down the showbiz staircase all the way to the top, so to speak, and is now sitting on the landing, absolutely sincerely happy about how much fun it is to be a rock star in a band. Flake, who's also a bit sad because he misses his adolescence in the GDR. And apart from that, he's not accountable for anything. "Do I still have dreams? I've already fulfilled all my dreams. And I didn't even dream most of the dreams that have come true."

Stretching over 350 pages, the confessions of the (overly) self-effacing Flake Lorenz are a pleasure to read, because they're strangely stimulating, like a self-help guide for people who've long since given up on themselves.

Even if the concrete, prosaically formulated advice that could be extrapolated from Flake's way of life can be summed up in no time at all. When he was still a child, Flake tells us, and was learning to ride a bicycle on the street in front of the family house, the neighbour, leaning over the garden fence, shouted to him: "Pedal, keep on pedalling and don't stop! - Those were the only words he ever said to me before he hanged himself, but it was exactly these words that were very helpful. Don't stop, just keep going."

But, as the neighbour himself confirmed, what applies to the life maxim "don't stop, keep going" also applies to the style in which "Today is the World's Birthday" is written: you think it's easy to imitate both of them. But in reality it's quite difficult.