

About...

Popular Music in Luxembourg

In the last decade, Luxembourg has seen the rise of an estimated 500 bands and artists – from pop, rock, jazz, blues and folk to hip hop, hardcore, electro and other popular music derivatives. According to the musicians' association Backline!, 200 of these musicians are active today, often rehearsing in family cellars and regularly performing before audiences, either in the smoky backroom of a small pub, as the opening act to an international band, at one of many open-air festivals or in the context of thematic events.



© Pierre Grandidier

Following three decades of private and associative pioneers working on the margins of "official" culture, the State finally acknowledged the keen public interest triggered by so-called popular music, by devoting to it a greater share of its cultural policy. On this account, the year 1995 – when Luxembourg was designated European City of Culture for the first time – can be considered a key date, the year in which new private and public initiatives were launched, the year the Rolling Stones attracted an impressive crowd of 60,000 to a field on Kirchberg and the year in which infrastructural projects in this sector gathered speed.

This accelerating development cycle reached its culmination in 2005 with the opening of the public institution Centre de musiques amplifiées, known as the Rockhal. Half a century after the birth of rock 'n' roll, pop and rock music is now fully recognised in Luxembourg.

Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Form of government: Constitutional monarchy

Neighbouring countries: Germany, Belgium, France

Area: 2,586 km²

Population: 476,000 inhabitants, of which 198,000 are foreigners

Population density: 178 inhabitants/km² (2006)



The indefatigable Guy Theisen, alias Leslie Kent, rocker with an international career and frontman of several formations
© Bob Krieps collection

The pioneer years (1950-1960): long hair, tea dances and hip shaking

Only five years following the recording in Memphis of Elvis Presley's first record, *That's All Right Mama* – considered the moment that rock 'n' roll was born – this new music style made its debut in Luxembourg. In 1959, the *chansonnier* Armando Bausch released a record featuring four Elvis songs translated into German. He admitted in an interview that, somewhat reluctantly, he preferred chanson, but that rock 'n' roll was simply more in demand at the time. A further five years on, another Luxembourg artist translated some other rock hits into German: the singer, actor and presenter Camillo Felgen was hired by the Beatles to translate – in a single night at the Georges V in Paris as the legend goes – two of their hits for the German-speaking market.

The songs called *Sie liebt Dich* and *Komm gib mir Deine Hand* were released on a single, which promptly sold like hot cakes.

The Grand Duchy had already established its direct connection to the international trends of popular cultures back in the 1930s thanks to the presence of a pioneer company on its territory: the *Compagnie luxembourgeoise de radiodiffusion* or CLR, which in 1954 – with the launch of its first television channel – became CLT and is now known as RTL Group. A private operator of radio and television broadcasting, the CLT owes its international expansion to its resolutely popular stance. Right from its early days, it represented an alternative to the public service channels of neighbouring countries, often perceived as a bit too serious by the general public. RTL Radio Luxembourg and RTL Télé Luxembourg brought cheerfulness along with pop and rock music to millions of European homes – including Luxembourg. Camillo Felgen, who was born in Esch-sur-Alzette, performed pioneer work from the 1960s onwards, launching a radio hit parade, which the international radio audience could take part in by submitting votes by mail. He proudly ranked among the first disc jockeys, popularising rock 'n' roll during dance evenings at bars.

At the same time, young musicians – some of these rock 'n' roll heralds were barely 15 years old back then – were influenced by what they were hearing on the radio and by the music featured in American films being screened in the country's cinemas. They threw themselves into the music, often with rudimentary instruments and makeshift technical equipment, and like their idols belted out tunes on their guitars in dance halls during the evenings, and also often at tea dances on Sunday afternoons. These bands were called The Youngsters, Rhythm Boys, The Outlaws, We Feel, The Outsiders or The Sharks, their most well-known musicians including Charly Hornemann, Fred Jager, Chris Baldo, Marc Jaeger, Raymond Tholl, Pipo Petro, Luke Haas and Willy Pulz. They made crowds swing their hips and were so successful they embarked on tours abroad, from Paris to Brussels, even to Vietnam to boost the morale of the American soldiers (*We Feel*, in 1968).

These groups, however, were but epigones of American idols, performing mostly cover versions of internationally successful songs, often in phonetic English. The first to

embark also on the production of original songs and the greatest star at the time, the only one to choose to make a living from his music alone and to achieve true international success, was Guy Theisen, frontman of several groups. He became a “music mercenary” in Germany, performing at more than 300 concerts a year and with several records to his name. Under his stage name Leslie Kent, he lived the life of a rocker, filled with sleepless nights, women, drugs and alcohol, before retiring to Luxembourg. Luxembourg film-maker Andy Bausch dedicated a documentary to Leslie Kent just prior to the latter’s death in 2006.

1970s to 1990s: DIY, the associative scene and first institutional steps

Following these pioneer years, the popular music scene diversified: more and more artists sought their own path, their own musical style, admittedly drawing inspi-

ration from what was happening abroad, but adapting this to their own context. The hippie years saw the emergence of a whole bunch of folk groups devoted to Luxembourg song tradition: the Dullemajik, centred around Guy Schons back in 1975, the Millermoaler, who wrote their own folk songs, Buffalo C. Wayne, devoting body and soul to country music, and D’Juju, more of a Latino-funk group, transforming dance halls into something akin to a great Brazilian carnival from 1982 onwards. Robert “Gollo” Steffen is generally credited with being the first to write and perform blues-rock songs in *Lëtzebuergesch*, the national language, from the late 1970s onwards, releasing records with his band and reuniting with it in 2006 for a revival. The Folk-Clupp, created in 1977, started organising folk concerts in several of the country’s event halls.

The young generations of the 1970s and 1980s still went to dances on a Saturday night to boogie to cover performances of the great international hits by groups



Zap Zoo, contemporary group formed around Serge Tonnar, music composer and lyricist whose songs are influenced by rock, folk and country music
© Yann Tonnar 2006



such as the Challengers or Fascination. This young public encouraged Luxembourg representatives at the Eurovision Song Contest – Luxembourg was crowned winner on five occasions – they read *Bravo*, the German magazine for young people, listened to the “Rockkëscht” by Fernand Mathes on RTL 92.5 and watched the programmes for young people broadcast on RTL Télévision, with its hit parade presented by Jean-Luc Bertrand and the music videos of disco and pop stars produced by the company Cerise in Bertrange. From the early 1980s, the radio monopoly of the Luxembourg channel was challenged by a number of small pirate radio stations broadcasting their programmes from abroad; they were called Radio Organique, Grénge Fluesfénelchen, Radau and RFM and popularised the new music styles.

Disco music never really took off in Luxembourg and punk did not arrive on the scene until quite a bit later. And so the predominant trends of these years were blues-rock, which was very popular and performed by several groups (the very prolific Cool Feet from 1968 onwards, Chris Birch Band, Nazz Nazz centred around Luxembourg actor Thierry van Werveke, or else the younger Blue Screw, to name but a few...), as well as pop music, the stars of which were called T42, Surf Cowboys, Jimmy Martin or else the emblematic Park Café. The latter, centred around Gast Waltzing and Maggie Parke, were the first in 1987 to produce a CD in Luxembourg, before landing a recording contract with a multinational company, and their jazzy single *My Song for You* became a big hit.

As well as performing with his bands, from Atmosphere to Park Café, the composer, lyricist and jazz trumpeter Gast Waltzing, following his studies at the music conservatoires of Brussels and Paris, started a department dedicated to jazz at the Conservatoire de la Ville de Luxembourg in 1986. This was an initiative that was to have repercussions to the present day, with many young talents passing through his classes and making a name for themselves on the international scene since the early 2000s. Around the same time, the first private music schools, such as Cavem, started to offer pop and rock courses – for guitar, percussion or bass.

Pop and rock concerts at the time took place in bars such as the Flying Dutchman in Beaufort, in discotheques such as Blow-Up in Luxembourg, or, from



We Feel, one of the rock groups of the 1960s to perform abroad, as far as Vietnam
© Luxembourg Underground Research Kitchen

the late 1980s/early 1990s onwards, at newly-founded festivals: Rock am Minett in Belvaux, Rock Koplëscht in Kopstal, and, from 1991, Rock um Knuedler, organised in the capital by the Luxembourg City Tourist Office. Nevertheless, popular music remained the neglected child of the cultural policy. It was during this time that the first voices calling for the construction of a venue exclusively dedicated to “music for young people” made themselves heard and that the State started seriously to consider this idea.

The Kulturfabrik: space of freedom

At the same time, in Esch-sur-Alzette, in the industrial south, an anti-establishment revolution was triggered in the city's former slaughterhouse, constructed in 1885 and closed down in 1979. In 1980, it became the squat home of a secondary school teacher, Ed Maroldt, and one of his classes, for the staging of a theatre piece in these premises so steeped in history. Gradually, the slaughterhouse, rechristened Kulturfabrik – factory of culture – was to become one of the high places of

counter-culture and so-called alternative cultures, from theatre to visual arts to music. During the first years of the Kulturfabrik's existence, from 1980 to 1995, the self-managed premises played host in particular to a multitude of hard rock and hardcore bands. Luxembourg groups such as Wounded Knee and DefDump rehearsed in these disused rooms and launched their international careers from there, while other legendary international groups stopped off to give concerts.

Following years of fighting for recognition, the Kulturfabrik was institutionalised during the mid-1990s with the creation of a non-profit organisation that henceforth took over its management. The premises of the former slaughterhouse were renovated in 1997-1998 with financial support from the municipality, the State and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Since then, the structure has been functioning as a full-time cultural centre, co-financed in equal parts by the State and the City of Esch. It accommodates among others a cinema, a gallery, a bistro and six rehearsal rooms for musicians, and boasts two concert halls (with seating for 300 and 1,000, respectively). The Kulturfabrik has made a name for itself thanks to its pioneering of new trends and its high-quality music programming. It welcomes all derivatives of rock, world music and chanson and hosts festivals dedicated to Luxembourg bands (Sonic Faces). Thanks to its flexibility, it has become a haven for numerous non-commercial and associative initiatives.

The quantum leap of the 1995 year of culture: awareness and shifting into top gear

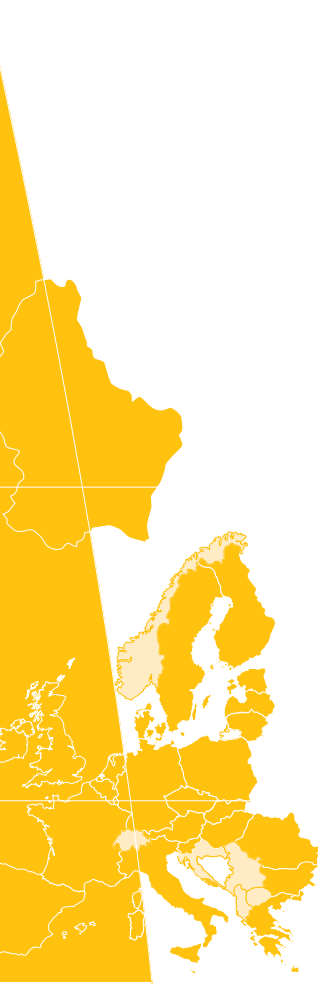
In 1995, Luxembourg was for the first time designated European City of Culture, under the leitmotiv of "year of *all* cultures". While it may be wrong to claim that the organisation of this cultural year had single-handedly enabled the great leap towards an official acknowledgment of popular music, the fact nonetheless remains that the polarisation around all things cultural certainly played a vehicular and even an accelerator role in many sectors, including that of pop and rock music. In any case, the organisers of Luxembourg 1995 – a joint venture between the State and the City of Luxembourg – foresaw a certain number of pop and rock concerts, either under a marquee erected on the Holy Ghost Plateau or in the halls of the Foires internationales, fair



Inaugurated in 2005, the Philharmonie is the work of architect Christian de Portzamparc
© Philharmonie/Jörg Hejkal

and exhibition centre. They also staged new festivals in the capital, such as the Jazz Rallye (which was to include blues from 1999) and Live at Vauban in the autumn, while expanding existing festivals like that of Rock um Knuedler, a large-scale summer festival, free to the public and right in the centre of the city.

Everything fell into place almost as if this pivotal year of cultural policy in Luxembourg had in fact crystallised a trend towards the professionalisation of popular music, which had started in the 1960s and gathered speed during the early 1990s. Thus, associations of musicians and music lovers multiplied at top speed, and municipal administrations and youth clubs started



launching their own music festivals. Dudelange, for instance, traditionally very active in jazz and world music, started organising the music festival Fête de la musique in 1994 and launched the Celtic festival, Zeltik, in 1998; in the mid-1990s, the young people of Echternach instigated e-Lake, an open-air concert devoted in particular to electronic music.

That same year, live music enthusiasts, idealistic and committed – led by Laurent Loschetter, Ferd Feidt and Petz Bartz – wanted to bring their favourite bands to Luxembourg instead of always heading across the border to attend concerts in neighbouring countries. This led to the opening of a concert hall, in a disused garage in rue de Hollerich in Luxembourg City, with an intimate atmosphere and room for just over a thousand: Den Atelier went on to become a great success story, one that remains ongoing, a place of strong musical emotions for entire generations.

In addition, a group of activists campaigning for the cause of popular music, as much the cause of the musicians as that of the public, created a non-profit organisation called Backline! during the mid-1990s. The latter was to become a tireless lobby for the

public support of pop and rock music in general, for the promotion of its members on a national and international level, as well as for the construction of an infrastructure for popular music, which would play host to large-scale concerts and contribute to the professionalisation of young ambitious musicians.

In view of this development and of the public pressure – a petition of the initiative Musek fir déi Jonk had gathered over 8,000 signatures, i.e. one inhabitant out of 50 in favour of an adequate infrastructure for concerts – the political authorities could no longer remain silent. In December 1996, Greens parliamentarian Robert Garcia submitted a private bill for the creation of a Janis Joplin Foundation, which was to devote itself to pop and rock music – the bill never came to fruition. In June 1999, however, Parliament adopted the government bill of the Minister for Youth, socialist Alex Bodry, for the construction of a concert hall for young people in the blower room of the former steel-works on the industrial wasteland of Belval-Ouest, a project which in the end never saw the light of day, but which opened the way for the adoption of a law authorising the construction of the Centre de musiques amplifiées, the so-called Rockhal, four years later.



Open-air concert organised by Den Atelier on the forecourt of the Centre culturel de rencontre Abbaye de Neumünster, with the vestiges of the fortress as a backdrop
© Hervé Montaigu

The 2000s: large-scale public infrastructures...

Initiated in the wake of the 1995 year of culture, large-scale public infrastructural work was to culminate in the first five years of the new century. June 2002 saw the inauguration on Kirchberg of the Centre national sportif et culturel (National Sports and Cultural Centre), called D'Coque, the large hall whose Arena can accommodate up to 8,300 spectators for large-scale popular music concerts. Renaud, Garou, Elton John, Bryan Adams and Udo Jürgens have all enjoyed very successful performances there. A few hundred metres away, on the Place de l'Europe, stands the Salle de concerts Grande-Duchesse Joséphine-Charlotte, otherwise known as the Philharmonie, which was inaugurated in June 2005. Besides hosting classical music concerts featuring the world's greatest orchestras in its auditorium (seating capacity of 1,500), its chamber music hall or its electro-acoustic hall, it also organises concerts featuring world music, jazz, chanson or electronic music. Who doesn't remember the performances of such icons as Marianne Faithfull, Goran Bregovic and his Wedding & Funeral Band or disc jockeys setting the foyer alight with their sound and light shows?

In the Grund, one of the lower parts of the capital, the former prison was converted into the Centre culturel de rencontre Abbaye de Neumünster (Cultural Centre Abbaye de Neumünster), a public institution that opened its doors in May 2004 and, in addition to exhibitions, conferences and theatre productions, also organises world music and jazz concerts, either in its Robert Krieps hall (seating capacity of 280), its brasserie or – in the summer – on its forecourt, in the context of its Omni (Objets musicaux non identifiés – Non-identified musical objects) festival. In Esch-sur-Alzette, following a quarter of a century of discussions, the Rockhal was inaugurated in September 2005, a public institution devoted exclusively to pop and rock music and boasting, in addition to its Centre de ressources (Resource Centre), two concert halls, one with 6,500 standing places, the other with 1,200.

These state infrastructures have been joined by municipal or regional cultural centres – such as the Centre des arts pluriels Ed Juncker (CAPE) in Ettelbruck, the Kulturhuf in Grevenmacher and the Kulturhaus in Mersch – each of which occasionally stages pop, rock,



Pascal Schumacher, promising representative of the new generation of jazz musicians
© Jos L. Knaepen

chanson or jazz concerts. The regional cultural centre Op der Schmelz in Dudelange, which opened its doors in 2007 and can accommodate approximately 500 in its main hall, aims to offer a musical programme in line with the identity that its cultural service has built up over the last twenty years: with an emphasis on jazz, world music and chanson.



© Christof Weber/SIP

Centre de musiques amplifiées, known as the Rockhal

The Centre de musiques amplifiées, known as the Rockhal, was constructed by the Fonds Belval on behalf of the State and inaugurated in September 2005. It is the realisation of a dream of several generations of musicians: a location dedicated principally to pop and rock music. In addition to two concert halls – the Main Hall with up to 6,500 standing places (or a seating capacity of 2,500) and the Club able to accommodate 1,200 standing spectators – the Rockhal is home to a Resource Centre, a complex of several rooms devoted entirely to popular music. This Resource Centre comprises six soundproofed rehearsal rooms, which can be hired out at an hourly rate to local bands, as well as a dance studio and a semi-professional recording

studio, also enabling live recordings to be made of concerts performed in the smaller concert hall. In addition, a documentation centre includes in its library everything related to popular music: books, magazines, recordings. Its constantly updated Internet site is home to a database comprising addresses and essential data for artists in search of information. Round tables, courses and workshops on various aspects of music – from professionalisation in matters of home recording to practical issues such as copyright or contact with the media – have proven to be highly successful. The structure can also be hired by other private or public organisers active in the field.

... bars and festivals...

For the public, the days of concerts forced to be held for thirty years in multi-purpose centres, ice-skating rinks and other sports halls – often with dubious acoustics – are as good as over and now people can listen to their favourite bands in perfect conditions and pretty much on their doorstep. However, there has been a reduction in the offer of “small” concerts in the bars and backrooms of cafés, which were often the launching pads for local bands. Admittedly, there are still some private “resistance fighters”, such as the brasserie L’Inouï in Redange (jazz), D:qliq in Luxembourg City (indie and electro), the Flying Dutchman in Beaufort (blues-rock), Shinyiz in Kehlen (gothic and hard rock) or other bars in the south, for instance 911 in Belvaux (rock). The tradition of performing before a handful of aficionados and friends, however, appears to be in peril.

With regard to the capacity of spectator numbers, at the other end of the scale, the 2000s are also the years that have witnessed a true explosion in the number of open-air summer festivals, often (co)financed by municipalities and free of charge or else very affordable for the public. Following in the footsteps of “dinosaurs” such as the Rock um Knuedler, Esch-sur-Alzette also launched a similar annual festival in 2001: Terres-Rouges aims to symbolise the new dynamism of the former working-class city, which is also home to two essential infrastructures for popular music in Luxembourg, the Kulturfabrik and the Rockhal. Its programme oscillates between leading international stars and more modest bands, depending on the promoter in charge. In 2002, the Luxembourg government celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community with a large-scale open-air festival called Steelworx, which was organised on the wasteland of Belval-Ouest and which saw several tens of thousands of spectators dance to the tunes of Indochine, Muse and Sneaker Pimps (programme by Den Atelier).

In Nieder Korn, the concert agency Cynart has for several years organised the festival Lët’z Rock. And in 2006, the organisers of Den Atelier launched a new large-scale festival in Roeser, called Rock-A-Field, the first edition of which featured headliners Franz Ferdinand and Placebo and took place in a very Woodstockian ambiance, and this not just because of the

mud caused by a hailstorm. In the summer of 2007, the Rockhal followed suit with the first edition of its Red Rock festival, held over two days and featuring bands such as Faithless, Daft Punk and Kaiser Chiefs.

Since 1994, the City of Dudelange has organised a yearly large-scale Fête de la musique, thus following – in an informal manner – the initiative launched throughout France in 1982 by the French Minister for Culture, socialist Jack Lang. This festival, celebrated each year at summer solstice on 21 June, encourages musicians and the public to head out onto the streets in search of music, some to play, others to listen. The event is entirely free of charge to the public and aims to popularise all sorts of musical practices. In 2000, the Luxembourg Ministry for Culture became a member of the Fête européenne de la musique network and for the first time organised such a manifestation in Luxembourg City. The non-profit organisation Fête de la musique was created in 2001, uniting the State, private organisers and Sacem (responsible for collecting and distributing music royalties), and since then it has organised this music festival each year throughout the entire country. In general, it takes place over the course of the week preceding 21 June, a week of festivities concluding on 23 June with the National Day celebrations.

All these initiatives, whether private or public, have no doubt significantly contributed to the country’s cultural influence and placed the Grand Duchy on the map as a notable stop-over between Cologne, Brussels and Paris for the European tours of great international bands. International promoters and agents have come to know and appreciate the public of Luxembourg and the Greater Region. While the music import industry now functions very well, the export network, however, is only just in its start-up phase.

... artistic proliferation...

The early 21st century is also and above all one characterised by an incredible artistic proliferation: never before have so many bands and artists embarked upon pop and rock music careers and expressed themselves in such different styles. Following decades of a predominance of blues among young musicians, challenged in the south of the country in particular by a passion for hardcore of the first alterglobalists or the chaos of a



Import and export: to put Luxembourg on the map

Because there is no real recording industry support and due to the lack of full-time music professionals (agents, managers, bookers...) in Luxembourg, any attempt to cross borders and to infiltrate the international market often feels like an obstacle course for local musicians. Indeed, in order to organise a tour, not only are contacts and addresses needed, but also means of transport, accommodation and so forth. Aware of this challenge – and of the costs involved – the musicians' association Backline! launched a Support Fund during the early 2000s, the aim of which was to support the promotion of Luxembourg bands on a local and international level, with selections made on the basis of applications. The royalties association Sacem Luxembourg also has a "cultural action" department operating a grant system, while the Ministry for Culture also selectively supports such projects.

Since 2005, however, cultural policies involving music have made a real leap forward, thanks to the participation of an official national stand at the Midem in Cannes, the biggest recording fair in Europe, and at the Popkomm in Berlin. About forty professionals, music venue operators, con-

cert organisers and more or less commercial recording labels each year take part in these events under the auspices of the Ministry for Culture. These events are also an opportunity for the artists to present themselves during promotional concerts, with all tastes catered for.

At the same time, the idea of the implementation of an export bureau is gathering momentum at the Ministry for Culture. It would be of the type that exists in almost all European countries and would associate the Ministries for Culture, of the Economy and for Foreign Affairs with the private sector, represented by the composers and lyricists grouped together in Sacem Luxembourg as well as the recording labels in the process of combining as a federation. Its mission is clear: the Luxembourg Export Bureau would organise participation in professional fairs, help musicians in their national and international promotion and serve as an intermediary between the international networks of such structures. Popular music is considered more and more to be an integral part of the "cultural industries" and not just the pastime of a handful of enthusiasts.

The open-air festival e-lake in Echternach, an annual event popular with young people
© Laurent Weber



political and easy-going anti-establishment rock (mostly in the capital), the 2000s are marked by a multiplication of genres. Thus, little by little, pop and rock, gothic, trip-pop, singer-songwriter music or even post-rock have imposed themselves and gained respectability thanks to their most visible heralds and to the work of new institutions, non-profit organisations, action groups and other volunteer idealists who support and promote them. Whatever their names – Own Records, Winged Skull, Schalltot, Maskénada, Kitty Music, Grand Duchy Grooves, LX5, Bloë Baaschtert, Ekzema, Embargo, Noiseworks Records, Nylon Records, WPRrecords, Get up Music, Dali-Tec, Salzinsel, Backline!, Panoplie or Op der Lay – they all get down to business with passion and furious energy, little financial means and a lot of commitment to defend and share the music they love. The talent contest Emergenza, organised in different locations from 2000 to 2005 by Get up Music, a non-profit organisation specialising in the promotion of artists, has contributed to the launch of many new bands, giving them a first opportunity to perform before a significant audience.

Jazz has definitely gone professional, with excellent musicians emerging from its specialised classes at the Conservatoire de la Ville de Luxembourg and continuing their careers abroad, from Greg Lamy to David Laborier, from Maxime Bender to Marc Demuth, from Georges Urwald to Pascal Schumacher, to name but a few. In 2004, jazz artist Gast Waltzing even launched a label dedicated entirely to local jazz talents, WPRJazz, which releases several CDs a year and has developed an international distribution network.

Electronic music has also emerged from the shadows, supported by festivals at the Kulturfabrik and the Rockhal, as well as by concerts held in the foyer of the Philharmonie and by museums and exhibition rooms such as the MUDAM or Casino Luxembourg – Forum of contemporary art. The middle of the 2000 decade has also witnessed a surfacing of new musical trends, such as rap and hip hop, enriched in particular by young immigrant generations.

In the last decade and a half, the budding cinema industry has created new openings for composers and lyricists. Artists like Gast Waltzing and Serge Tonnar have been commissioned to write film music for international productions by Luxembourg production



Concert of Jeff Herr Corporation in the chamber music hall of the Philharmonie
© Pierre Grandidier

houses, such as The Carousel Picture Company or Samsa Film. Film director Andy Bausch, immersed in pop and rock music since his childhood and harbouring a lot of admiration for pioneers of popular cultures, has always integrated original music by local artists in his films, whether they be fiction films or documentaries. The theatre, with its structures that have also multiplied and professionalised, offers a further possibility of interdisciplinary collaboration for many musicians, allowing them to embark upon the creation of original soundtracks. In particular small-scale experimental associations, like Independent Little Lies or Maskénada, offer opportunities for creativity.



Copyright and legal deposit: Sacem Luxembourg and CNA

The French society of music composers and lyricists, Sacem, has had a Luxembourg branch since the first half of the 20th century. Its aim was above all to collect the royalties due from the airing of titles by its members on the antennae of RTL Radio Luxembourg. As the result of an increasing number of Luxembourg composers and lyricists becoming members of this subsidiary, the decision was made to create a non-trading partnership under Luxembourg law: Sacem Luxembourg, which started its activities on 1 January 2003. It is dedicated to the invoicing of royalties that are incumbent on the media broadcasting from Luxembourg, but also more particularly to the management and the enhancement of the Luxembourg repertoire.

In 2006, it counted 450 members, who are represented by an advisory commission of the entitled parties that comprises nine members. In addition to distributing paid royalties, it is also devoted to cultural actions, such as the support of local artists' projects by means of grants, and has launched a petition to increase the representation of works by Luxembourg musicians in the national media.

The legal deposit of audiovisual works, whether films or sound recordings, is centralised by the Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA) (National Audiovisual Centre) in Dudelange, whose mission it is to archive this cultural heritage.

Rock um Knuedler, organised by the Luxembourg City Tourist Office, on the place Guillaume II
© Luxembourg City Tourist Office



... increasing support by the media thanks to their proliferation...

At the same time, following the liberalisation of the electronic media in 1991 that removed the monopoly of radio and television broadcasting held by CLT-UFA/RTL, new media started to emerge little by little. From the sociocultural radio station Radio 100,7, a public station, to the now legalised radio stations born from the pirate culture of the 1980-1990 period – Eldoradio, targeting the young, DNR, a general-interest station, or Radio Ara, an associative station offering numerous specialised musical programmes, including “Bloe Baaschtert”, dedicated exclusively to Luxembourg pop and rock music – all were asking for popular music.

Nevertheless and in spite of this proliferation of radio stations, local artists were feeling increasingly excluded from musical programming, structured very much according to an international pattern. This is why the approximately 450 composers and lyricists affiliated to Sacem Luxembourg launched a petition in 2004 entitled *Pour la création musicale au Luxembourg* (In favour of musical creation in Luxembourg), which demanded the introduction of a broadcasting quota of at least 15% for works by Luxembourg artists, following the example of France. In view of this pressure, the audiovisual media finally submitted willingly and without legislative intervention to the demand from composers and lyricists for an increase in local titles in their musical programming. Because the quality is now comparable to that of international products and the majority of artists in any case opt for English as their language of expression, the listener is often not even aware of the fact that this is music “made in Luxembourg”. In hit parades that involve audience participation, local artists generally achieve very good positions.

The same phenomenon of an increase in channels has made itself felt in television from 2002 onwards, with the creation of Tango TV, a private operator belonging to the telecommunications company Tango/Tele 2 and targeting above all a young audience. This triggered a reaction from RTL Télé Lëtzebuerg, which first of all launched a parallel programme for young people called Planet RTL, then an entire channel, Den 2. RTL. The Tango TV venture, rechristened T.TV in November 2004, came to an end in March 2007 when the channel, which was never profitable, was closed down by its



The singer of Portuguese origin Raquel Barreira combines numerous musical influences in her mother tongue
© Manuel Dias

owners. However, the production of music videos, often rather rudimentary and produced with basic means, developed into a real craze thanks to these new distribution platforms.

The written press has also seen its capacity multiply during the 1995-2005 decade, with the creation of new newspapers, from the weekly *Le Jeudi* (Editpress group) to the daily *La Voix du Luxembourg* (Saint-Paul Luxembourg group) and the daily *Quotidien* (Lumedia). All these media aimed at new readers quickly discovered the significance of a young readership and therefore from the start dedicated a special place to popular music, CD reviews, concert announcements as well as features about international and local bands and artists. This caused the established papers to react and to re-orientate themselves. The independent weekly *d’Lëtzebuurger Land* regularly dedicates articles to popular music, which are subsequently made available online. Its alternative counterpart



Multilingualism versus *lingua franca*

From its very beginnings, pop and rock music “made in Luxembourg” has been sung primarily in English, the *lingua franca* of popular culture. The first rock ‘n’ roll bands sang above all cover versions, often in a rather broken, phonetic English. In their eyes, as in those of their colleagues throughout the entire world, rock ‘n’ roll was Anglo-Saxon, even international, and thus had to be sung in English. Robert “Gollo” Steffen was the first to use *Lëtzebuergesch* for his outspoken blues-rock.

The predominance of English lyrics remains a constant until today in pop and rock music in Luxembourg, a trilingual country in its daily life – with *Lëtzebuergesch* being the national language as well as the official language alongside German and French. Be they hardcore or punk rock bands (DefDump, ExInferis, Fast Friday, Eternal Tango...), alternative rock bands (Zap Zoo, Metro, Mack Murphy and the Inmates Couchgrass, Lo-Fi, Torpid, LaFaConnected...), singer-songwriters (Daniel Balthasar, Claudine Muno, Raftside, Dream Catcher...) or electro-pop groups (Low Density Corporation, Hal Flavin...), the great majority of artists express themselves primarily in English. Nevertheless, coupled with European discussions on cultural diversity, more and more composers and lyricists are daring to choose other

languages for their songs. *Lëtzebuergesch* was for a long time restricted to the folk domain (Dullemajik) and fairground and carnival celebrations (Fausti, Cool Feet), but has witnessed a true revival in the last ten years and this in numerous styles: Dadaist songs (Plakeg oder Ugedoen), poetic songs (Legotrip), rap music (Battaklang), binary rock (Moof), punk and even ska punk (Toxkäpp). And all have proven, with a greater or lesser degree of success, that the national language can be used for this, that it has many subtleties and enough flexibility to express all sorts of emotions, love, rage and despair... all this without any nationalist tendencies whatsoever.

German makes only very rare appearances in the repertoire, while French, the country’s second official language, is being used more and more, as young composers and lyricists or rappers use it successfully. The successive waves of immigration into the Grand Duchy have also contributed to the enrichment of popular cultures, including music. Raquel Barreira, for instance, a singer of Portuguese origin, mixes numerous influences, from fado to jazz to pop, all of it in her mother tongue. Rarer are those artists who switch from one language to another in one and the same song, like The Gentles in their educational song on road safety, *Firwat?*

The Centre national sportif et culturel, D’Coque, can accommodate up to 8 300 spectators
© Christof Weber/SIP





Eternal Tango, group known for its incredible live performances
© Gary Crietee

Woxx also occasionally publishes a supplement dedicated exclusively to popular music, called *Musixx*.

The specialised, cultural, or even musical press nevertheless remains in an embryonic state, for lack of a true market. The city magazine *Nico* published by Mike Koedinger Éditions, which regularly dedicated itself to current affairs in popular music, ceased publication in 2006. The pioneers of the photocopied music fanzines from *Non-X-Magazine* to *Disagreement*, born in the counter-culture of the 1980s, have gradually disappeared, or have been moved to the Internet, which is less costly in terms of production and allows an eclectic audience to be addressed more easily. The webzine *Fanhead*, for its part, has never even been produced in a paper version.

In 2001, a new alternative publication was nevertheless launched by Infoladen Schrëibs, which has its seat in the Kulturfabrik in Esch-sur-Alzette: the periodical *Queesch*, alterglobalist and anti-establishment, dedicates a significant place to Luxembourg popular music and, in addition to a paper magazine, publishes a promotional CD comprising original songs by bands it supports. *Salzinsel*, another new publication, brought out by an eponymous non-profit organisation, has dedicated itself since 2004 to the visual arts, dance, theatre and music. In June 2006, the company Clearbay Ltd started issuing a monthly publication in newspaper format entitled *Upfront – Music Orientated Listings Guide for Luxembourg & the Greater Region*, which devotes itself almost exclusively to pop and rock music and also publishes dates of concerts as well as interviews with

The public of popular music

For its statistical series, *La culture en chiffres* (Culture in figures), the Ministry for Culture, Higher Education and Research commissioned a study entitled *Les concerts au Luxembourg* (Concerts in Luxembourg) (nr. 5, October 2006). It comprised three sections: research into music venues undertaken in 2005, two TNS-ILRES surveys from 2002 and 2003-2004 based on a sample of 9,767 concertgoers in order to draw their profile, and two “transversal” investigations carried out by CEPS/Instituut voor de Participatie van het Publiek in Concerten (data: PSELL study 2002). Despite having been collected mostly before the opening of the new public concert infrastructures such as D’Coque, the Philharmonie and the Rockhal, the results are nevertheless proof of a high regular presence of the Luxembourg public at concerts.

Thus, almost 40% of all grand-ducal residents attend a concert at least once in twelve months, placing Luxembourg in 6th position in Europe; residents taking part in the survey attended on average 8.5 concerts a year. The new infrastructures have increased the capacity of the main auditoriums from 3,500 places during the early 1990s to more than 27,000 places at the end

of 2005. In 2005, 644 concerts were on offer, welcoming 325,000 spectators in total. Out of this total, 278 concerts fell into the category of classical music or opera, the rest being qualified as popular music in the broad sense, drawing close to 200,000 spectators in one year.

Those under 35 represent more than half the spectators, all genres put together, but a real generation gap can be noticed between the two groups of concertgoers. Those under 35 frequent essentially pop and rock concerts, whereas the public of classical music concerts is in essence composed of those over 35. Pupils and students represent over 45% of the pop and rock concert-going public – the establishment of the University of Luxembourg in Esch-Belval next to the Rockhal thus also accounts for a proximity of the two types of public. Almost 80% of the concert-going public are residents.

27% of pop and rock spectators were not satisfied with the concerts on offer prior to 2005 and over half felt that entrance tickets were too expensive.

© Uli Wenzel



artists and CD reviews. This journal, which is entirely in English, is distributed free of charge and at a wide circulation in the railway stations of the Greater Region as well as in bars and music venues.

... and towards the democratisation of production means

Paradoxically, the culture of pop and rock music appears to be reaching its peak in Luxembourg, while the recording industry is nevertheless witnessing a global decline. Because it ignored or at the very least underestimated the revolution of the Internet, of the MP3 and similar formats, of peer-to-peer downloading and of the dematerialisation of music, the music industry was caught by surprise during the early 2000s and is having to fight to win back consumers, by placing more bets on the market of live concerts. While record sales have dramatically dropped in the last ten years – a trend also witnessed in Luxembourg where record dealers are disappearing one by one – the grand-ducal pop and rock musicians are instead profiting from this revolution. Indeed, to reach the threshold of profitability for a record produced by an independent label – taking into account the studio recording, remastering, pressing, graphic design, marketing, etc. – at least 2,000 copies have to be sold. However, bearing in mind the small size of the national territory and therefore the limits of the potential market, a record that does well in Luxembourg might at best sell 600 to 800 copies. The heavyweights of the music industry, established in Brussels, Paris and Berlin, have (so far?) shown little interest in Luxembourg artists, who have trouble imposing themselves in view of the market domination by the big American or British names. Even just to be visible and audible, to be noticed.

As long as the international market does not open up to them, it is unthinkable for the majority of pop and rock musicians to live exclusively off their music, as the opportunities to play and make money doing just this are too limited on a national scale. There are only a few rare musicians, who are also composers and lyricists and thus able to increase their activities and their sources of income, who have dared take the big leap to independence. The obligation to earn their living elsewhere, however, forces many of them at a given moment to choose between pursuing either music,

their studies or their job, which explains why so many bands are discontinued or dissolved, often following the launch of a first CD or the completion of secondary school studies. Groups that release a second or even a third record in the same constellation and continue to mature together are very rare.

But for the young ones, those that do embark upon the path of making music, the Internet has suddenly become a true godsend, thanks in particular to file-sharing sites such as myspace.com, which features a number of pages dedicated to Luxembourg groups, or else iTunes, the downloading platform run by Apple, which established its European headquarters in Luxembourg in 2004. These sites allow young musicians to introduce themselves for little money, to upload selected songs to their individual webpage for people to listen to, and finally to benefit from an opportunity of being internationally noticed without having to go through the big machine



Since 2001, the Terres-Rouges festival attracts thousands of spectators to the south of the country
© Guy Hoffmann/SIP

of the music industry. Some, in particular those who have carved out a highly specialised stylistic niche for themselves, have already embarked upon an international path, resulting in tours and invitations to perform at specialised festivals.

In addition, the democratisation of production means, in particular due to the implementation of music processing computer software, has resulted in CD cost prices

coming down. The watchword at the moment is home recording: an entire album can now be recorded in a rehearsal room or in a home cellar with nothing but a computer and a few microphones as basic equipment. Certainly, to the discerning ear of a specialist sound technician, the sound quality may not be the same as that of a professional product, but at least these albums now exist and enable bands to progress and to prove their talent in the form of recordings they can send to record labels, to concert organisers and media specialists or else sell to their audience. In order to contribute to the professionalisation of homemade recordings, the Resource Centre of the Rockhal, for instance, organises beginners' courses in its recording studio.

Beyond the market considerations – the Ministry of the Economy is incidentally gradually discovering the music sector as an economic sector in its own right – the new technologies have also revolutionised music styles. Synthetic sounds, sampling, the alienation of the human voice or the digital reproduction of natural sounds and instruments are further contributions to have changed the entire spectrum of popular music, well beyond electro, house or techno music.

In fifty years, popular music has grown up – also in Luxembourg. Often of great musical erudition and armed with the latest technologies, musicians now help themselves to the history of popular music and cultures as though delving into a huge toolbox, decomposing and recomposing elements in order to turn them into something new, to find their own style. Their lyrics talk of love, the errors of youth, problems with parents, girlfriends and society, the world as it goes by, injustices, war and disillusion. Pop and rock music is also an oscillograph of contemporary society, illustrating times of prosperity and times of crisis, identity downturns and anti-establishment outbursts of the moment.

Over the course of a quarter of a century, official support for pop and rock music has found its place in Luxembourg and is starting to function well. But it will never be able to play the role of relay, since nothing can ever replace the passion of the public, this mysterious link that establishes itself at the time of a concert between those that are on stage and those that stand before them.



The singer-songwriter Daniel Balthasar at the Water-Art Festival in Insenborn
© Véronique Kolber

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Webography

“A propos Rock”. Online folder of *d’Lëtzebuurger Land* containing the main articles dedicated to popular music and associated cultural policies, as published in the weekly paper. www.land.lu/html/dossiers/dossier_rock/index.html

Backline! Site of the pop and rock musicians’ association, including concert announcements, CD releases and useful addresses. www.backline.lu



Centre de Ressources (Resource Centre) of the Rockhal, containing a database of the music scene's players as well as the documentation centre catalogue, currently being established. www.cr.rockhal.lu/fr/

Disagreement. The former fanzine turned webzine, updated on a day-to-day basis with concert and recording reviews. www.disagreement.net

Fanhead. Webzine of passionate music enthusiasts, containing concert announcements and CD reviews. www.fanhead.lu

Ministère de la Culture, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (Ministry for Culture, Higher Education and Research). Public site containing information on the grant and support system for artists. www.mcesr.public.lu

Sacem Luxembourg. Information on author's royalties and their defence association in Luxembourg. www.sacem.lu

Some useful addresses

Institutions

Centre de musiques amplifiées – Rockhal, tel.: 24 555-1, www.rockhal.lu or www.cr.rockhal.lu/fr

Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA) (National Audiovisual Centre), tel.: 52 24 24-1, www.cna.public.lu

Fête de la musique Luxembourg a.s.b.l., www.fetedelamusique.lu

Luxembourg City Tourist Office (organiser of festivals such as Rock um Knuedler, Blues'n Jazz Rallye and Live at Vauban), tel.: 22 28 09, www.lcto.lu

Ministère de la Culture, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche (Ministry for Culture, Higher Education and Research), tel.: 247-86619, www.mcesr.public.lu

Sacem Luxembourg, tel.: 47 55 59, www.sacem.lu

Main concert halls

Centre culturel de rencontre Abbaye de Neumünster (Cultural Centre Abbaye de Neumünster), tel.: 26 20 52-1, www.ccrn.lu

Centre de musiques amplifiées – Rockhal, tel.: 24 555-1, www.rockhal.lu

D'Coque – Centre national sportif et culturel (National Sports and Cultural Centre), tel.: 43 60 60-1, www.coque.lu

Den Atelier, tel.: 49 54 66-1, www.atelier.lu

D:qliq Music Bar, tel.: 26 73 62, www.dqliq.com

L'Inoui, tel.: 26 62 02 31, www.inoui.lu

Kulturfabrik, tel.: 55 44 93-1, www.kulturfabrik.lu

Salle de concerts Grande-Duchesse Joséphine-Charlotte – Philharmonie, tel.: 26 02 27-1, www.philharmonie.lu

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