

Ellen Allien

by Martin Turenne

Berlin hipsters always seem to be mourning the city's lost spark, pining for the post-Cold War heyday when squats and cellar-dwelling nightclubs housed an underground revolution. No matter the complaints of her contemporaries, Ellen Allien sees no reason to pine for the past. According to the techno maven, there's never been a better time to be an artist in the German capital.

"Influences are melting; breaks, beats, guitars--everything is possible," says the owner of the BPitch Control label. "We have never had a better position than now. It's great to see all the grown structures, and I'm very proud of being part of it. When people cry for the old days, then they are blind for the present."

As the driving force behind BPitch and the bimonthly Boogy Bytes parties, Allien is ensuring the enduring vitality of Germany's largest city with a passion bordering on the fanatical. The producer's dedication is explicitly audible on her sophomore album, *Berlinette*, a collagist's ode to Berlin's eclectic aesthetics.

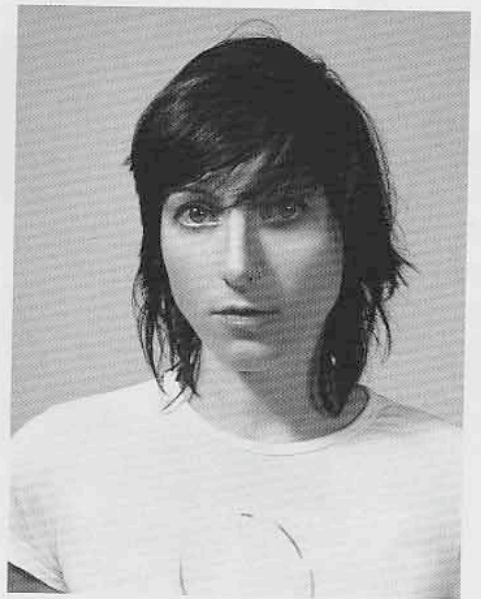
"The present Berlin reminds me somehow of the 1920s," she says. "[At that time] the society was exploding and changing. Artists who joined the Dada movement, like Hanna Höch, John Heartfield, or Max Schwitters used old and new technologies, like radio, magazines, [and] films

for their art. They used it in a way of montage. Their ironic view onto the world [and] their critical political position makes it easy for me to adopt it as a principle of describing my own work."

Allien relates her combined use of analog and digital gear to the Dadaists' cross-epochal approach to technology. But no matter the conceptual tag applied to *Berlinette*, the Bay Area's hipsterati has already taken notice, as Allien's future projects include a Gold Chains remix and an EP for Kid606's Tigerbeat6 label.

The infatuation with Allien is understandable, as she brings an unerring sense of melody to techno's oft-severe template, sprinkling in hooks aplenty without disturbing her work's steady rhythmic foundation. On *Berlinette*'s standout track, "Sehnsucht," the producer scythes her own voice, layering a chorus of auto-erotic exclamations over a bracing postindustrial beatscape.

Like a technofied and distaff version of Prefuse 73, Allien makes liberal use of vocal chops, often running her voice through virtual stompboxes to create synthesized passages of sound. While every technophile on the block seems to be tinkering with vocalists, the German is treating her voice like no other, denaturing its humanness while preserving its sensuality.



"I use my music as a diary, and as a mirror," she says. Indeed, *Berlinette* is the work of a sophisticated aesthete, offering a vivid portrait of the artist as a confident young woman, a torchbearer for Berlin's new sense of cool. Listen up.

***Berlinette* is out now on BPitch Control.**