



The floating German cultural centre has cruised back to town for endless new waves of music, art, theatre and film.

## ALL ABOARD THE GOOD SHIP STUBNITZ

By Marie-Claire Melser

The free ferry ride from behind Central Station to NDSM, where the German trawler *Motorschiff Stubnitz* has docked, is a trip in itself. The open water

of the IJ is hypnotic, and you pass the urban hipster beach Amsterdam Plage that has once again sprouted out of the barren urban wasteland of Stenen Hoofd. Its colourful neighbours, Sijladam and Graansilo, jut out into the water.

This former industrial complex once acted as one of the city's more dynamic cultural squats before having been transformed into—one has to admit—beautiful apartments. And as a floating club/theatre/gallery, the *Stubnitz* also rates as another prime example of an industrial object being transformed into a cultural hot spot.

The first floor has two different rooms. One has two bars and a dance floor with a hole in the middle, down which you can look at another dance floor below. The other smaller room has chairs and a film screen. Susanne Pahlke, who is responsible for booking and graphic design, explains: 'We show films here obviously but this room is also good for more intimate live performances.'

Everything in the public spaces is decked out in shiny wood. The iron bar and tables add to the industrial feel of the ship. Pahlke: 'We made all this ourselves, mostly from stuff we found.' Even the iron disco lamp? 'That's our own design as well. We have a do-it-yourself mentality on the *Stubnitz*, which is how we keep the costs down. Everyone has the capability to make things, but because you can buy everything these days most people never fully develop these natural skills. A Swedish guy who had just broken up with his girlfriend came on board in Hamburg. "Only for a little while", he thought. Now he is our webmaster. He had no previous experience but learned everything he needed while on the *Stubnitz*.'

At the bottom of the ship are the editing rooms. Explains Oskar Wlaschitz, who is in charge of video documentation, 'Here is my workshop. I record all the shows and make a short production of each one.' Pahlke continues: 'We don't have much money to pay the artists, but this is the one thing we can offer: a video production of the performance. Of course we also give them free drinks and lots of fun.'

For each part of call, the *Stubnitz* crew develops a unique programme. 'Basically what we do is make a cultural map of each city we visit. Beforehand, we do research on the cultural scene and look for interesting artists as well as groups that could help us set up things. In Amsterdam, we were naturally attracted to such organizations as the Beat Club, 3voor12, DFM Radio, Club

Vegas, Salon USSR and a few others. On the programme are local artists and international names. We live in an electronic arena, so most music makes use of electronics, but in fact we programme every genre. I am particularly looking forward to the 'New Japan' night with Mama Milk, a Japanese duo with accordion and contrabass. We've also booked a country special with the American band Hazeldine, and a night with Narrowsminded, a record label from Amsterdam. And of course, there will be plenty of DJs looking for those who just want to party.'

The *Stubnitz* used to be a fishing boat before it was left to rust away in Rostock's harbour. In 1991 a collective of artists bought the ship and transformed it into a cultural centre for music, exhibitions and documentation. It became the heart of Rostock's electronic music scene. In 1993 the ship started to travel. It has set sail to St Petersburg (1993), Malmö and Stockholm (1998), Hamburg and Rotterdam (2001), Brugge and Amsterdam (2002), Szczecin (2003) and Riga (2004). This year the ship has taken its most extensive journey so far, visiting Dunkirk, Copenhagen, Rotterdam, Newcastle and now Amsterdam.

'The people in Rostock are really sad now, as they have to miss the ship for so long,' Pahlke says. 'But I do hope we will continue travelling a lot.' So the *Stubnitz* will be back in Amsterdam next year? 'We're working on it,' she says.

*Stubnitz* functions as a non-profit organisation out to stimulate experiment and cultural exchanges. A crew of 14 volunteers lives and works on the ship. Pahlke, who is originally from Rostock, doesn't live on the ship anymore (in 2002 I fell off the ship to live in Amsterdam), but she still works for *Stubnitz* as a booker. Wlaschitz, originally from Vienna, came on board in Hamburg in 2003.

'Only when we are travelling do we hire a professional crew of seamen,' says Pahlke. 'Then immediately a traditional ship hierarchy sets in. The seamen give orders and we clean the decks [she laughs]. But when in a harbour, we are on our own again. Then there are no rules.'

MS *Stubnitz* is at NDSM until 9 September. Take the ferry to NDSM from behind Central Station. Admission €3-15. For programme see [www.stubnitz.nl](http://www.stubnitz.nl)