Push the button: reels spin. Ping-ping-ping. Watermelon, gold bell, bar symbol – or, in this case, Rhodri Davies, John Chantler, Jaap Blonk, or Jérôme Noetinger, Richard Lerman, Marta Zapparoli. Click play on a crayon-coloured interface and treat yourself to a random combination of three recordings from a choice of 158, each one just 45 seconds long, on instruments ranging from voice or harp to radio waves, field recordings and hydrophones, by 13 different artists and musicians from countries all over the world. That works out as 3,944,312 combinations of this online fruit machine, nearly four million unique tracks, a new virtual band every time, generated in an instant.

In 1792, a musical dice game – often dubiously attributed to Mozart – delighted the European middle classes with a system for randomly compiling two-bar phrases into "as many waltzes as one desires". In 1961, Raymond Queneau's *Cent Mille Milliards De Poèmes* combined couplets on flippable subdivided pages to produce up to a hundred thousand billion possible sonnets. But Achim Zepezauer's *Slot Machine* project is inspired less by Oulipian wit or Enlightenment fancy, more by the composer's own existing curatorial practice. "I run a concert series in the Künstlerhaus here in Dortmund since four years now," he tells me via Skype. "I always have three different acts, each playing about 20–30 minutes, and I like contrasts. I always try to surprise the audience." This time he's surprising even himself.

The specific impetus to create the present website came at the end of 2014 when Zepezauer was preparing to play a gig in Aachen with trombone player Paul Hubweber. "The guy organising it wanted to hear a recording of us together," says Zepezauer. Only one problem – they had never played together before

and lived in different towns 150 kilometres apart. No problem. Zepezauer had Hubweber send him a solo recording and layered it over one of his own. "It worked perfectly. Nobody ever asked a question," he recalls. "So that was the moment when I thought, let's try it out. Let's randomly put some stuff together."

Chance and serendipity figure heavily in Zepezauer's life. If the drum teacher in the small Münsterland town where he grew up hadn't been abruptly fired, Zepezauer's older brother might never have given up learning the drums – and that drum kit in the basement of the family home might not have been lying there dormant for an eight year old Zepezauer to start bashing around on. Around the same time, he bought his first records – by Mother's Finest and Art Blakey – both of which, he says, "just caught me. I spent hours in the record store at that age. The guy would throw me out because, he told me , 'You keep listening to records but you don't buy anything!'

"I was always fascinated by sound," he continues – so much so that, afraid of over-academicising it, he refrained from studying music, and went to art school instead, "because music was too dear to me". There he made sculptures of chewing gum and puppet shows scripted like Merce Cunningham choreographies, combining the two halves of a dialogue only at the moment of performance. "The randomness," he explains, "was what was interesting to me."

In May 2015, Zepezauer made a film called *Das Ende Der Kohle* (*The End Of Coal* – but also, according to Zepezauer, idiomatically translatable as "The End Of Your Money"). Over 30 minutes of slow-dissolving black and white footage and stop-motion animation, the film explores the decline of the mining industry in the Ruhr and the alchemy of artistic creation. "The

main thing," he tells me, "is that there are all these moments where something touches another thing, some sort of reactions is sparked in different things – sometimes intended and sometimes accidentally – but it changes the story and leads to something else."

The film was soundtracked by 40-piece Dortmund big band The Dorf, composed by the group's Jan Klare. And for Zepezauer, joining that group 12 years ago was just such a moment of spontaneous alchemical reaction. Up until then, he had mostly been a drummer – whether drumming along at home to ZZ Top records or on stage and on record with jazz groups like Roots Of Time To Come No 5 and the Ernst Dittke Septett. But when Klare asked him to join The Dorf, both knew they already had two drummers. Instead, he brought percussion instruments and a Korg Kaoss Pad, then "one gig after the other, I had one percussion instrument less and one more effects unit". Slowly but surely, The Dorf made Zepezauer into an electronic musician.

Today, Zepezauer's website lists a bewildering array of bands and projects, from playing in dadaist improvising trio Hampelstern-Terzett to electronics in the more groove-based Das Behälter to solo concerts with prepared cassettes, films, radio broadcasts and more, all gathered under the loose umbrella of Kuhzunft, a tongue in cheek neologism based on the German word for future (Zukunft) that he came up with back at art school, frustrated by the labels slapped onto movements, eras and genres. "It's not future," he says, "but still it has to do with the future in some sense. The future is in there, but it might be something else." □ Achim Zepezauer's *Slotmachine* is released by Gruenrekorder this month kuhzunft.com
Robert Barry

Reel
Time

The experiments of composer **Achim Zepezauer** include music via the medium of fruit machine

Recording

Thekla Ehling